

India Now

May, 1983

Monthly News Publication of Indian People's
Association in North America (IPANA)

This PDF is prepared by Sukhwant Hundal in memory of his father
Shivdev S. Hundal and mother Harbans Kaur Hundal.

Source: Sukhwant Hundal's personal collections

INDIA NOW

Vol. 6 No. 5 May 1983 Monthly News Publication of Indian People's Association in North America

Drought Hits Many States

SEVERE WATER SHORTAGE IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu has been facing a severe water shortage which has led to many deaths. Water has been rationed in many parts, especially in Madras, where each family is allowed 3 buckets of water a day. Water is being transported from neighboring Andhra in trains and trucks. Many people have been sleeping at night near water distribution points. Some localities get water only on alternate days. The sale of water is booming. Riots have broken in several parts of Madras over drinking water. The state government has ordered the schools to close early for the summer holidays.

Gastroenteritis and jaundice are reported to have claimed 31 lives in Madras city over the last two months. According to Tamil Nadu's health minister, 115 persons have died of the two diseases in Madras, South Arcot and Ramanathapuram districts in last few weeks.

In Parliament, members from some of the southern states staged a sit-in protest against a lack of government assistance for the south which is also short of rice. As 25 members squatted in the center of the upper house, they chanted, "we want rice, we want rice."

After the opposition demand to rush food supplies to drought-stricken areas, Indira Gandhi made an inspection flight over areas of Tamil Nadu.

Lack of winter rain has damaged rice and lentil crops in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra.

OVER 100 DEAD OF STARVATION IN RAJASTHAN

In Rajasthan, at least 115 people were reported to have died of starvation; unofficial estimates put the figure to be over 200. Most of the deaths occurred in Jodhpur, Barmer and Charu districts. Tens of thousands had left their homes in search of jobs and food.

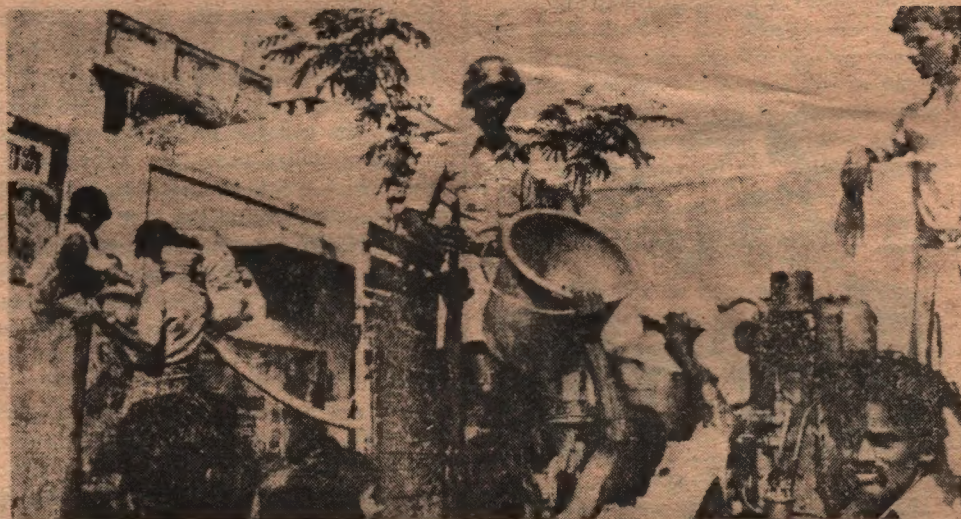
According to the officials, over 2/3 of the 33,000 villages in Rajasthan with a population of over 20 million have been short of food and water. Crops have withered and people are living on roots. Reports following a visit to the Shergarh tahsil of Jodhpur by a team of medical experts suggested that malnutrition coupled with sudden changes in weather could have caused the deaths. Malnutrition is related to the fifth consecutive year of drought in some parts of western Rajasthan. Villagers in Jodhpur reportedly told the medical experts that hunger was one of the main causes of their illness.

Officials however denied that deaths could have been caused by starvation. They have attributed the deaths to lack of medical attention.

Many parts of India have been facing a drought situation for quite a few months.

BIHAR

Water crisis has gripped several parts of Bihar also, especially the districts of Gaya, Nalanda and Monghyr. In Maharashtra, over 1/3 villages have been declared drought-and-scarcity-affected areas.



Madras: Armed police escorts have been posted at lorries transporting drinking water to different parts of the city. While water is pumped into a steel tank here in Vyasarpadi, boys try to get even the water spilling from the pumpset in the vehicle. - The Hindu.

Amritsar Kala Kendar to Visit North America

Our Vancouver Correspondent

The Amritsar Natak Kala Kendar will be performing in a number of cities in Canada and in New York City between May and July. The troupe is led by Gursharan Singh, the Punjabi playwright, and will perform in Punjabi as well as Hindi.

ANKK performs plays based on stories from Punjab's history, especially stories that have relevance to present day issues. Some are simple parables, like *Eh Lahoo Kisda Hai* (Whose blood is this), which is based on Guru Nanak's encounter with a rich man and a poor worker. *Chandi Chowk ton Sachind Takk* (from Chandni Chowk to Sachind) presents the sacrifices of Sikh gurus in the present-day context. The story is based on Aurangzeb's oppression and Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom. Written and performed first during the Emergency, the play resulted in Gursharan Singh being jailed for the play's comments on the political situation in the country in 1975.

Jis Sacch Palle Hoi (the one who speaks the truth), authored by Gurdial Singh Phul, was first performed at the 500th anniversary of Guru Nanak's birth in 1969. It has been performed in India more than 1600 times.

The tentative schedule for ANKK's tour is for the group to perform in British Columbia between May 28 and June 19, Calgary on June 25, Edmonton on June 26,



Gursharan Singh

Saskatoon on June 30, Winnipeg on July 2, Toronto between July 3 and 10, Montreal on July 16 and New York on July 17. For more information about the exact locations and dates of the performances, please contact the local IPANA unit (addresses given on page 2). In BC, call Harinder Mahil at 604-588-0002; in Toronto, call Gurmeet Kang at 416-792-2500 or Tania Dasgupta at 416-743-5280.

The first program is at Vancouver Technical Secondary School, 2600 East Broadway, Vancouver, on Saturday May 28 at 7 PM.

Possible Victory for Delta Plating Workers

A major development has taken place in the case of the twelve Indian workers who were fired illegally on January 31 at the Delta Plating Company in Mississauga, Toronto. After an extensive investigation of the case, Human Rights Commission officers have asked the company to reinstate the workers by May 15.

The support committee, made up of IPANA, legal workers from Parkdale Community Legal Services, Jim Renwick, NDP MP, Pape Sikh Temple VP Balraj Singh Deol, has been working to reinstate the workers. Earlier on the company was ordered to pay its workers over \$10,000 for overtime pay by the Employment Standards Office.

Tania Dasgupta of IPANA, who has been active in the support committee, told India Now that this would be the second victory in the reinstatement of illegally fired Indian workers. The earlier victory was in the case of 23 Indian women fired at the Canadian Pizza Crust Company, who were reinstated at the end of 1982.

We will give a further report on this issue in the next issue of India Now.

For further information, and for anyone who needs support in similar problems, please contact IPANA, Box 1135, Station B, Weston, Ontario.

INSIDE

Rice Export Scandal

2

38 People Killed in Police Firing

3

The Untouchables of India

6

Indo-Pak Joint Commission Formed

9

IPANA to Support Ujjal Dosanjh in B.C. Elections

IPANA has decided to fully support Ujjal Dosanjh, the New Democratic Party candidate from the Vancouver South constituency, in the forthcoming elections to the B.C. Provincial Assembly. Dosanjh has taken progressive

stances that concern the East Indian community. He has supported the cause of farmworkers in B.C. and has been actively involved in the fight against racism. IPANA supports people, particularly members of the East Indian community, who have taken firm stands in support of the community. IPANA supports Ujjal Dosanjh in this spirit.

Ambedkar Birth Anniversary Celebrated in Toronto

(Toronto, April 16)

The Ambedkar Mission of Canada held a celebration today on the occasion of the 92nd birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Attended by over 100 people including many women and children, the nearly 3-hour celebration eulogized Dr. Ambedkar for his contributions to the struggle of millions of Indian untouchables, to the independence movement, drafting of the Indian Constitution, and the revival of Buddhism.

Invited guests to the celebration included a representative of Vision, the venerable Chandra Bodhi from U.K., Dr. Barbara Joshi of the Minority Rights Group, and Dr. Shree Mulay, secretary of IPANA.

Ambedkar Mission of Canada and its sister organization, Vision in the USA, have drawn attention to the plight of millions of untouchables in India through publications and demonstrations in front of Indian government offices and the United Nations.

Apart from several speeches and cultural events, the celebration was marked by the showing of the documentary "An Indian Story" by Tapan Bose and Suhagini Mulay. Introducing the film, Dr. Mulay expressed satisfaction that both IPANA and the Ambedkar mission have a lot in common because both stand for complete equality of the nearly 100 million people of Indian condemned as untouchables.

Reality and Relevance — In Memory of Marx

A. AZAD

1983 marks 100 years since the death of Karl Marx. Around the world numerous commemorations are taking place to honour the contributions of one of the most important social activist-analysts of modern times. Several years before India's independence, the significant relevance of Marx was noted by Nehru in his *Glimpses of World History* (1934) as follows:

"In the middle of the nineteenth century there arose a man in Germany who was destined to become the prophet of socialism and the father of that form of socialism which is known as communism. His name was Karl Marx. He was not just a vague philosopher or a professor who discussed academic theories. He was a practical philosopher, and his method was to apply the technique of science to the study of political and economic problems."

While the principal and bulk of Marx's writings deal with concrete issues and conditions of European society he did give some attention to other parts of the world including India. The most well known of his views on India are contained in a series of five essays written for the *New York Daily Tribune*. These essays outlined Marx's understanding of (i) the nature of ancient Indian economy, (ii) the sequence of political events in Muslim India, (iii) the functioning of the British East India Company, (iv) the character of the war of 1857, and (v) the future results of British rule in India.

In this centenary year of Marx's demise, it is particularly pertinent to emphasize the critical core of the analysis of society developed from the writings of Marx. This critical core of Marx's legacy to social analysis is made up by three interrelated and interacting components:

(i) In order to comprehend the structure of modern society it is necessary to clearly grasp the basic relevance of how class and non-class divisions combine to shape the structure of society.

(ii) Social change is brought about by a combined and contradictory interaction between political, ideological and economic forces. At differing stages and levels of social change, there exists an autonomy for and a determinant effect of the political and ideological forces.

(iii) Historically societies have changed in differing sequences and different directions (multilinearly), not in the same sequence and in one direction (unilinearly).

During the 20th century, orthodox social analysis derived from Marx and institutionalized in the dominant Marxist organizations has insisted on a strictly me-



Karl Marx

chanical way of using class categories. This approach reduced all and every aspect of society to crude class categories. To put it in another way, the description and analysis of society was simplistically determined by class divisions. In somewhat sophisticated versions of the above approach, a secondary recognition was accorded to non-class social divisions but ultimately they too were subordinated to class categories. Such a mechanical understanding of social divisions stems in part from the fact that in Marx's writings there is no systematic exposition of class. And partly from the uncritical use of analysis developed in Russia and China. The

relevant autonomy and determinant effect of non-class social divisions such as gender, ethnic and religion have either been rejected or ignored. Only in recent years in the context of the failures of institutionalized Marxist organizations can one see the rediscovery of the significance of non-class social divisions. It is analysis-cum-practice, which combines the use of class and non-class divisions, that has begun to illuminate the contemporary structure of society and to point toward the possible ways of developing organized alternatives to the dominant and dominating social system.

In orthodox Marxist analysis, economic forces are deemed to be the engine of social change. Political and ideological aspects are directly derivable and dependent on the economic forces. Based on such an one-sided analysis, a grand design regarding the maturity and imminent collapse of capitalist society was postulated. Given the collapse thesis, the main task was to mobilize a segment of the population which would be ready to take over the function of political rule at the moment of the breakdown of society. Of course the general collapse has just not materialized and orthodox Marxist analysis has not been able to provide viable answers. It is in such a context that one needs to underscore the importance of the specific investigation of social conjuncture. Society at particular historical periods (conjunctures) is the outcome of the political, economic and ideological activity of a people's social existence. Not only is there autonomy between the political, economic and ideological forces but at times the economic is subordinate to politics and ideology. In other words the economic forces are determined by political and ideological forces. After all in India over the past 30 years, the economic condition of a substantial majority has worsened, yet the required political mobilization/organization has not developed to realize a basic change of those social conditions.

It has been almost axiomatic to depict the direction of changes in society as a

sequential unfolding from primitive to slave to feudal to capitalist to socialist systems. Everywhere such a sequence was inevitable and the appropriate mobilization was simply to be applied after having learnt its details from texts and/or the experience of Russia and China. However rigorous historical, archeological and anthropological evidence indicates that the sequences were not as depicted as above. In India, researchers like D.D.Kosambi, R.S.Sharma and D.N.Jha have demonstrated the non-existence of slave society and the significant differences between India and European feudal society. In other words, the one-directional premise of social change just does not accord with a critically investigative perspective of history. Formulas are often comforting in times of trouble and turbulence but factual rigor is must more convincing and useful.

In conclusion, it is only fitting to recall that Marx on one occasion observed, "History has no other way of answering old questions than by putting new ones." And Lenin, who along with Mao Zedong stands as one of the two most important exponents of the ideas of Marx, warned the social activist-analyst to constantly guard against dogma in their work: "In no sense do we regard Marxist theory as something complete and unassailable. On the contrary, we are convinced that theory is only the corner-stone of that science which socialists must advance in all directions if they do not wish to fall behind life."

Lok Sabha Pays Tribute to Karl Marx

The Lok Sabha paid tribute to Karl Marx on his death centenary on March 14. The Speaker Balram Jakhar called Marx a great thinker whose ideas had made a worldwide impact.

The Indian government is planning to bring out a commemorative stamp on Marx's death centenary.

Rice Export Scandal — Over Rs 500 Million

A note circulated to opposition MPs by a group of local grain dealers in New Delhi reveals a scandal in exports of rice to the Soviet Union in which the parties involved might have made as much as Rs. 520 million. According to the allegations, an Indian company that had a contract to supply 127,000 tons of basmati rice last year and 80,000 tons of the same rice this year to Russia instead sent the same quantity of this cheaper variety of permal rice. In 1982, basmati rice was selling at Rs 5,500 a ton where permal rice was selling at Rs 2,500.

According to the note, the govern-

ment decided to turn a blind eye to the transaction because of the alleged involvement of many top politicians. The government reportedly helped the transaction go through by relaxing the procedure for inspection of grain to be exported. Instead of following the regular procedure of either the Ministry of Agriculture or the Export Inspection Agency of the Ministry of Commerce inspecting the basmati rice, the Commerce ministry issued a notification that in case of exports to the Soviet Union, private inspection agencies could make the inspection. It is alleged that no inspection was ever made.

The note also alleged that various companies were set up to arrange for payments; a few of the suppliers helped by providing false bills showing inflated payments. The custom officers at the Kandala port were pressured to clear the consignment without raising any questions.

The note alleges that the order for rice was placed with the company involved after political manipulations at a high level. Among the partners to the deal were a businessman from Haryana who is a close associate of Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, the yoga teacher who is considered very close to Indira Gandhi family.

Per-Acre Wheat Yield Increasing

The per-acre yield of wheat has been rising, the minister of state for agriculture, Yogendra Makwana, told Parliament on March 21. He stated that the yield per acre had been 571 kg in 1975-76. It rose to 581 kg in 1979-80, to 660 kg in 1980-81 and 687 kg in 1981-82.

Measures being taken to step up productivity further include extension of irrigation and high-yielding variety coverage, timely supply of critical inputs like diesel, electricity, fertilizers, pesticides and the development of appropriate high-yielding and disease- and rust-resistant varieties of wheat suited to various agro-climate zones.

Bombay High Exports

About 4.8 million tons of Bombay High crude are expected to be exported in 1982, somewhat more than in the previous year. Most exports go to France, Australia, US, Spain and Singapore. The value of the exports is over Rs 10 billion.

Govt Policies Help Big Industrial Houses

Sunil Maitra, a CPM MP, made a strong plea in the Lok Sabha on March 14 for effective land reform, subsidizing 14 essential commodities including rice, wheat, cloth, and edible oil, remunerative prices to the cultivators and cutting down of imports. Initiating the general discussion on the budget, he sharply criticized government's fiscal and economic policies and charged that the government gave concessions to big industrial houses at the cost of the common man.

Calling for land reform, Maitra said that 40% of the agrarian land was held by 4% of the population, comprising money-lenders and persons of their type. He added, "Land should be taken away from them and distributed among the landless. This is the only way to resurrect the rural economy."

Assets of Tatas & Birlas Rising Sharply

Deputy Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs Ghulam Nabi Azad told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply that the assets of Birlas and Tatas, the two largest industrial monopolies, amounted to Rs 18.4 billion and Rs 16.9 billion respectively in 1981. In 1980, Birlas and Tatas had assets worth Rs 15.4 and Rs 14.3 billion; for 1979, the figures were Rs 13.1 billion and Rs 13.1 billion when the Birlas surpassed the Tatas. The increase from 1979 to 1980 was 17.5% for the Birlas and 9.3% for the Tatas; the increase from 1980 to 1981 was 19.6% for Birlas and 18.2%. During this period, Indian industry has not been doing well.

The Birlas' assets were Rs 500 million in 1950 and they increased to Rs 5,765 million in 1968 and to Rs 9,000 million in 1974. For the Tatas, the figure in 1950 was Rs 940 million, almost double Birlas' assets. They increased to Rs 5,840 million by 1968 and Rs 10,000 million in 1974.

Foreign Collaborations Show Sharp Increase

The number of new foreign industrial collaborations in India increased to 593 in 1982 from 389 in 1981. The US led the western countries with 110 collaborations; UK was a close second with 107. Other countries included France, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Canada and Netherlands.

The equity investment jumped to Rs 660 million in 1982 from Rs 110 million in 1981. A major portion of the increase was accounted by the Rs 265 million invest-

ment by Japanese companies in Maruti. Gulf countries had Rs 200 million of investments. Investment by nonresident Indians accounted for Rs 115 million. This investment of Rs 660 million in 1982 is in contrast to the Rs 620 million invested in 9 years from 1973 to 1981. It appears that the government's liberalization of foreign investment policy and a sustained campaign to project India as a viable place for foreign investments seem to be working.

and adverse seasonal conditions.

A cross-section of farmers, who were interviewed by the Indian Express in March, feel that the Public Works Department should now take up the desilting work of channels and canals in the delta and give employment to idle farmworkers. Silting of channels and canals in the last few years has affected water flow to the paddy fields and this year it has affected the crops very much. At several places growth of bushes was seen in the canals and channels obstructing river water.

Drought Leaves Rs 1.5 Billion Crop Loss

Thanjavur district, which lies in the Cauvery basin, is now under the grip of severe drought and as a result more than 1,000 villages in the district are facing problems ranging from drinking water supply to unemployment of farm workers.

The heavy loss in paddy production in the delta of about Rs 1.5 billion this year has affected farmers and the state economy.

Farmers in dry-tract areas covering mostly the new delta areas find no scope for employment because of crop failure

38 People Killed in Police Firing Akalis Block Roads to Press Demands

KISHAN BAJWA

According to Akali Dal President Harchand Singh Longowal, 38 people were killed in police firing and many injured in different parts of Punjab on April 4 as the Dal initiated a new agitation by blocking roads in Punjab to press their demands. Longowal told reporters in Amritsar on April 5 that the police firing was indiscriminate and demanded an inquiry by a High Court judge into the incidents. Longowal also demanded the immediate withdrawal of units from the Central Reserve Police (CRP) and Border Security Force (BSF) and warned that there could be fresh trouble if they were not pulled out. According to PTI, Longowal said on April 4, "Today's killing of innocent people has forced us to think of changing strategy." He did not elaborate further.

CALL FOR WORLDWIDE PROTEST

Longowal called for worldwide protests by the Sikhs against the killings and to mourn the dead. He fixed April 17 for the observance. A demonstration organized by North American Akali Dal was held outside the Indian consulate in San Francisco protesting against atrocities committed by the paramilitary forces on April 11. North American Akali Dal and other Sikh societies including those associated with the Khalistan movement also held a demonstration on April 18 at the United Nations and the Indian consulate in New York. Jagjit Singh Chouhan, the self-proclaimed leader of Khalistan, led, with others the demonstration.

Chouhan lives in England and is visiting the US to canvass for Khalistan with the representatives of many countries in the UN as well as American officials. He was not granted a visa for He was not granted a visa for several weeks until the Senate Agriculture Committee invited him to testify. Chouhan and Akali Dal President presented a memo to the UN secretary general asking for UN intervention. A demonstration was planned in Vancouver as well.

LONGOWAL REJECTS TALKS

Longowal has rejected requests by Union Home Minister Prakash Chand Sethi to resume talks with the center. "We cannot hold your hand when you are holding a rifle." According to the United News of India, the Akali Dal high command has decided to follow a hardline program after April 14, a part of which is a statewide general strike. On April 14, 35,000 volunteers were given an oath by Longowal along with Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to "always be ready to make any sacrifice for the betterment of the Panth."

GOVERNMENT BLAMES AKALIS

According to official estimates, 21 people died and over 250 were injured in clashes between the police and the demonstrators on April 14. Home Minister Sethi defended the role of the police in Parliament saying that they had exercised restraint and patience but had to resort to force in the face of what he called unprovoked violence and arson. Sethi added that demonstrators blocking the roads had confronted the police with swords, spears and guns and had caused considerable damage to the property; according to Sethi, 175 policemen were injured. According to a police spokesperson, many of the deaths took place in exchanges of gunfire between protesters and the police. Longowal denied Sethi's allegations that his supporters were armed and had indulged in acts of violence.

The recent violence was the worst since the Akali agitation was launched over 2 years ago. A few days before April 4, the government arrested more than 1200 activists of the Akali Dal; most of them were released by April 19 to help ease the tension.

There were reports of a series of bomb attacks prior to April 4; the state government attributed the attacks to Bhindranwale's followers. There were at

least three bomb attacks on April 7. One bomb injured the assistant station master of the Gheri rail station, 12 miles from Amritsar, and his son. The second bomb was thrown at a camp of the CRPF in Amritsar. The third was thrown at the residence of Jathedar Rachpal Singh in New Delhi; Rachpal Singh's faction does not support the agitation called by Longowal. There was also a report of arms stolen from a Home Guards armory in Ferozepur; 14 sten guns, 28 rifles and 359 rounds of ammunition were missing. Bhindranwale's followers are suspected to have been involved in the theft.

The situation in Punjab is becoming more tense as there were reports of some Hindu organizations organizing a force of 10000 volunteers to "defend national integrity."

PUNJAB ASSEMBLY ASKS SGPC TO HAND OVER SUSPECTS HIDING IN RELIGIOUS PLACES

The Punjab state assembly passed a resolution earlier that criticized Shromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee for trying to run a state within a state. It called on the committee officials to hand over people wanted by the law who had taken refuge in the gurudwaras and buildings associated with it. All the assembly members except those belonging to CPM voted for the resolution; the Akali legislators had resigned their seats in February as asked by Longowal to press for Akali Dal's demands.

According to official reports, many followers of Sant Bhindranwale, who are suspects in murder, bomb explosion and other anti-social acts, are being sheltered by the Sant in the Guru Nanak Niwas, which adjoins the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Sant Bhindranwale himself used the Golden Temple and his gurudwara at Qadian to hide when there was a warrant issued against him following a Nirankari leader's murder as well as Lala Jagat Narain's murder two years ago.

Indira Congress Trying Hard to Topple Hegde Govt

According to an article by DK Joshi in India Abroad, Indira Congress has been maneuvering to topple the Hegde ministry in Karnataka. The main personality Congress(I) has been betting on is S. Bangarappa, the dissident leader who revived Kranti Ranga. Bangarappa has publicly expressed his conditional support to Hegde government but his activities and speeches have been severely targeting the Janata government led by Ramakrishna Hegde for what he calls its lack of performance.

Bangarappa reportedly feels betrayed by Janata's high command, especially by Janata party president Chandra Shekhar. Bangarappa claims that he was promised chief ministership before the elections but after the election results, Chandra Shekhar wanted Hegde to be the chief minister.

According to Joshi, Cong(I) has also been trying to woo two actors Raj Kumar in Karnataka and Prem Nazir in Kerala. Congress(I) wants to use Raj Kumar and his influence to confront the Janata challenge while it would like to consolidate its base using Prem Nazir in Kerala. Joshi links the Padma Bhushan being awarded to both Nazir and Kumar this year to Congress(I)'s plans to use them for its political advantage.

Ram Lal Ousted in Himachal

Himachal Pradesh has a new chief minister, Virbhadra Singh, former union minister of state for industries. This followed the sudden resignation of Ram Lal who met Indira Gandhi on April 5 when he was reportedly asked to relinquish the office.

According to United News of India, Lal quit following growing pressure from the dissidents who had been meeting several union ministers telling them of Lal's alleged misuse of his office and the alleged involvement of Lal's son-in-law and other relatives in a recent forest scandal. (From Indian Express)

Jagannath's Wheels

P.K. KRUPAKARAN

The possibility of a denouement in Bihar's political crisis, engendered by the axing of 11 ministers appears to be receding. So is the threat to the leadership of Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra. Instead, his opponents, who had accused him of every conceivable aberration under the sun in the hope that the central leaders would see their point of view, are down and out.

Mishra's meeting with the Prime Minister on March 16 is said to have eased the crisis. There are those who believe that a calculated move is on, with the blessings of New Delhi, to refurbish the image of Mishra and to prepare the ground for his induction at the center.

It all began with Mishra announcing his resolve to shelve the controversial Bihar Press Bill and to re-establish rapport with journalists. This was followed by the return of accreditation cards to those journalist who had been discredited earlier after they had turned in their cards in protest against the Bill. Striking the iron while it was hot, Mishra also announced the withdrawal of cases launched against those local newspapers and journalists who had agitated against the Bill.

Next came an omnibus anti-corruption ordinance which was intended to cover all those who had anything to do with PWD, the Forest Department, the public distribution system, or the procurement of foodgrains.

Mishra went a step further and announced the procedure for dealing with ministers suspected of corruption. Opposition MLAs grasped this opportunity and submitted a memorandum of charges against the Agriculture Minister, Ramesh Jha, to the Speaker. The latter is to head a committee of opposition leaders that will examine the charges with a view to presenting its findings. In case a prima

facie case is established against any minister, the Speaker will recommend a regular official probe to the chief minister.

Mishra seems not to have spared himself either. He has announced that the Bihar Lokayukta Act would be amended to bring the chief minister within its ambit in case anyone wished to level charges against him.

Whether or not this will induce the people to view Mishra as a "crusader against corruption" is a moot point. The exercise itself is designed to give Mishra a new clean image so that his entry into the central cabinet "at the appropriate time" will be easy and it will be difficult for anyone to throw stones at him, according to close observers.

(from the Indian Express)



Mishra: Bihar Press Bill is Dead

The journalists, reporters and hundreds of thousands of democratically minded people who had demonstrated on the streets to protest against Jagannath Mishra's Press Bill in Bihar won another political victory. The Mishra government has reportedly decided to shelve the bill. This announcement was made by Chief Minister Mishra himself on Feb 22 that his government had forgotten the bill and would not pursue it. The Bill though claimed by the government to have been introduced to curb "scurrilous and yellow journalism" was viewed by its opponents as a way to muzzle the press. Earlier the union home ministry had sat on the bill for over 4 months when it came for approval to the President before it could become a law; because of nationwide protests, the home minister had returned the bill in November to the state legislature for re-

consideration. But the Mishra government had denied getting it back from the central government reportedly to avoid controversy on the eve of elections in Tripura, Karnataka and Andhra.

The action committee of the Bihar journalists announced that its agitation would not be suspended, "until and unless the government announces the death of the Bill on the floor of the Assembly." The committee also thanked all organizations of journalists all over the country, including the Editors' Guild of India, for their cooperation in the movement.

Meghalaya Ministry Falls Due to Congress(I) Maneuvering

A 14-member coalition government led by Indira Congress leader Capt. Williamson as chief minister took over after the coalition government of Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party led by BB Lyngdoh resigned. Lyngdoh lost his majority in the 60-member legislature following the withdrawal of support by 6 assembly members. Three of them have been rewarded by Williamson with inclusion in his cabinet.

The Lyngdoh ministry could survive only for a month because 4 of its members decided to withdraw support and switch sides. A no-confidence motion against Lyngdoh ministry was passed with 31 for and 27 against. Governor Prakash Mehrotra accepted the Lyngdoh's resignation and invited Williamson Sangma of Indira Congress to form a coalition government. No party got a majority in the recent elections to the 60-member state assembly.

Recently there was a report of one legislator withdrawing support from Sangma ministry but Sangma is reportedly confident that this posed no threat to his ministry.

On Assam

By A Correspondent

It is clear that the main property of the movement is the Assamese regional bourgeoisie backed by the Assamese bureaucracy and the communal overtone of the movement is very much evident. To attribute the term 'people's movement' to every regional struggle has been a bad practice of our progressive intelligentsia who often become forgetful of the much more real issue of who fights whom.

In the 1931 census, 42% of the total population in the Brahmaputra Valley was reported to be Assamese. The same proportion rose to 71% in the 1971 census. The reason is twofold. First of all, a gradual process of assimilation of the non-Assamese people into the Assamese cultural mainstream has been operative all through these years. The second reason is the deepseated fear of persecution among a section of non-Assamese which has compelled them to register themselves as Assamese. To the extent that the second factor has been operative the process of assimilation has been impeded. In any case, this phenomenal growth has largely eroded the possibility of a "loss of identity" of the Assamese nationality. It is the Bengali Muslims who have been mainly treated as foreigners and massacred. Many with regular citizenship certificates have not been spared. The Nellie massacre, really gruesome in its breadth, is an ample revelation of the proto-fascist character of the movement. The targets of attack include Jharkhandis too. To take a view of the census data, the percentage of the Muslim population before 1931 was 25 plus. In 1971, it was 24 plus. Even if allowance is made for the separation of Sylhet in 1947, the number of Muslims as a fraction of total population cannot be said to have increased largely due to immigration. Moreover a large number of immigrants have already been deported.

What is particularly distressing is that a section of the Naxalites in West Bengal are trying to justify the chauvinist cause by referring to the "crisis" of Assamese "national identity." They have gone to the extent of inviting leaders of the AASU. History has shown that even if such crisis exists, it may not necessarily lead to democratic struggles, it may give rise to Nazism, as well. Hitler and his Nazi followers wanted to exterminate the Jews, basing themselves on the German national pride which was wounded by the treaty of Versailles.

The Assam unit of the PCC, CPI (ML), participated in the election and won the Nalbari seat which they lost to CPI (M) in 1977. In the Abhayapuri (North Goalpara) constituency which they won last time, the election could not be held at all. Thanks to its historical weakness, coupled with the capitulation of CPI (M), Mrs Gandhi (whose forces had, at the beginning a hand in the riots) has been able to project herself as the savior of the hapless minorities. This is the real tragedy. Mrs Gandhi's announcement of elections was cleverly calculated but a boycott would have certainly strengthened the hands of chauvinists who responded to the announcement by a bloodbath of the Bengali and tribal peasants.

This correspondent had the privilege of interviewing a CPI (ML) leader in Calcutta. He was however candid enough to admit that some sort of "crisis of identity" did exist and the Assamese bourgeois-landlord clique, true to its tradition, is using this crisis to hoodwink the Assamese masses. He said that in order to dispel such fears of loss of identity two issues should be raised and popularized: (i) constitutional guarantee for perpetuation of Assamese as the state language (which it already is), and (ii) constitutional guarantee for majority status to the Assamese-speaking people in legislature and jobs. If the demands can be raised and popularized by all genuine progressives acting in unison, the tide of chauvinism is bound to be checked in the near future.

Some Facts Behind the Assam Fire

SANDHYA GOSWAMI

The recent bloody turmoil in Assam has no doubt brought into sharp focus the Foreign Nationals Issue that has been simmering for long in this border state with occasional flare-ups, false hopes and aborted dialogs. However, some confusion still seems to exist as to the real character and motive behind the movement. Sadly enough, what is essentially a national issue has been labeled by many as communal or ethnic. For an objective assessment of the Assam problem, the historical perspective and socio-cultural contexts of the region have to be kept in mind. This paper presents some facts.

Today, the Assamese nationality is faced with a situation where their national identity is being threatened due to unrestricted flow of immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh. The basic Assamese fear is losing their land and along with it, their culture and civilization. At the root of the problem in Assam is a complex set of factors that are historical, social, cultural and economic.

COLONIAL LEGACY

Immigration to Assam is a long historical process. The British opened the doors to Assam to suit their own colonial exploitation. The tea industry was to provide new avenues of investment for British capital. As recorded in the 1901 census report of India, "As many as 597,000 people were brought to Assam during the preceding decade alone to meet the requirements of the tea industry." In addition to regular importation of tea garden laborers, there was the voluntary stream of Muslim settlers from the then East Bengal. Driven apparently by high population pressure on land in their native country, attracted by the freedom of settlement in the ryotwari system and encouraged by the landed gentry in Assam, the land-hungry peasants began to pour into Assam. C.S. Mullan, superintendent of census operations in Assam in 1931, observed that "Continued influx of land-hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims, from the districts of East Bengal and in particular from Mymensingh seemed likely to alter permanently the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization."

Another important fact to remember in this context is that as a result of the British policy of introducing Bengali as medium of instruction and court language in Assam from 1836 to 1871, immigration of people, mainly professionals and clerks, from neighboring West Bengal took place.

POST-INDEPENDENCE

The failure of independence and partition to put a stop to the influx from East Pakistan (subsequently Bangladesh) has added a new dimension to Assam's demographic balance. This problem was officially recognized by the central government way back in 1950 when Parliament passed the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act of 1950. The preamble to the Act recorded the threat posed by immigrants: "During the last few months a serious situation had arisen from the immigration of a very large number of East Bengal residents into Assam. Such a large scale migration disturbs the economy of the province besides giving rise to a serious law and order problem. The Bill seeks to confer necessary powers on the central government to deal with the situation." However the Act remained a showpiece since its enactment and was subsequently repealed in 1957. The immigration continued unabated.

Such symptoms are already visible. Indeed there has been a polarization among the Assamese people with the initiative remaining in the hands of upper caste Brahmins and Kalitas. A large number of prominent personalities have been seen campaigning against the chauvinist frenzy. This probably marks the beginning of the end of nefarious game of the Assam bourgeois-landlord clique which owes all its growth to outbursts against minorities.

(from Frontier)

Analyzing the demographic changes in Assam during the preceding 70 years, the Census of India, 1971, said: "Taking the whole population of 3.3 million in Assam in 1901 as indigenous and applying the all-India rate of increase of 130% from 1901 to 1971, her population in 1971 would be 7.6 million instead of 14.6 million."

Although under the law of the land aliens cannot be allowed to decide the political destiny of any state or the country, this is precisely what is happening in the case of Assam. This fact was indeed realized by the central government as early as 1963 when in a document released by it, Influx-Infiltration from East Pakistan, it was said: "The fact is that the enlistment of foreigners in the voters' list has taken place at the instance of politically interested persons or parties. Political parties have been known to take dubious steps to inflate the number of their supporters at election time, and some undoubtedly used the illegal settlers from Pakistan towards this end. The mere fact that a person's name is, rightly or wrongly, inscribed on the voters' list does not prove or confer Indian nationality or citizenship. This legal position has been confirmed by decisions of the Supreme Court."

It was precisely because of the government's failure to deal with the silent invasion by the foreign nationals that a massive, popular movement started in Assam from 1979 onwards demanding revision of the voters' list followed by detection and deportation of foreign nationals.

ECONOMIC ASPECT

The acute economic backwardness that has plagued Assam for long has accentuated the deleterious impact of migrations on the economy. The growing problem of landlessness and unemployment coupled with decades of neglect and underdevelopment explains the justifiable fears in the Assamese mind of losing their culture and civilization and becoming a non-entity in their own land.

Despite being the country's largest producer of tea, oil and plywood, Assam is industrially the most backward state.

The 756 tea gardens of Assam account for 58% of India's tea production. The production figure for 1978 was 300 million kg. Assam's tea earns Rs 50 billion annually as foreign exchange for the country. The head offices of most of the Assam tea gardens are located in Calcutta and about 80% of the sale and distribution of Assam tea is controlled by auction centers located in Calcutta and London. This colonial set-up deprives Assam of most of the benefits from tea grown in the state.

Assam produces 4.1 million tons of crude oil, which accounts for 60% of the

country's total production. The bulk of Assam's oil is refined at Barauni in Bihar with a capacity of 3.6 million tons. The three refineries in Assam have an average capacity of 0.6 million tons only. Assam also produces 600 million cft of natural gas per day.

As reported in the Economic Survey, 1977-78, by the Assam government, the percentage change over previous years in industrial production is 2.02 for Assam as against 5.23 for India as a whole. In the agricultural sector too, the picture is equally dismal. In a single decade, 1961 to 1971, the size of per capita agricultural holding in Assam registered a decline by 26% as against the national average decline of 16.7% during the same decade.

The State Planning Board of Assam in the draft Fifth Plan estimated that 77% of the rural population of the state lived below the poverty line. The National Sample Survey (26th round) reported 83% of the operational holdings in Assam in 1971-72 were uneconomic. In 1961-62, the same survey concluded that the percentage of households owning no land was highest in Assam (28%) compared to other states in India (9% in Bihar, 13% in West Bengal, 12% for the whole country). Due to the extremely slow rate of economic development and exceptionally high growth rate of population, the problem of unemployment in Assam has intensified in recent years. In 1978-79, the per capita income in Assam was Rs 852 compared to Rs 1,236 in India as a whole.

In the light of the facts discussed so far, it is not difficult to see that the illegal immigration of foreign nationals into Assam has serious political, cultural and economic implications threatening not only the identity of the Assamese people but the very security and integrity of the country at large. No country that seeks to preserve itself can afford to ignore or feign to wish away a national issue like this. It is merely a coincidence that the foreign nationals sneaking into Assam happen to speak Bengali, which is a minority language in the state spoken by 20% of its population. This fact has given handle to many to brand the Assam movement as one against the local Bengalis. Likewise, the fact that the foreign nationals are Muslims and the majority of the population in Assam are Hindus has been exploited by interested as well as ignorant quarters to smear a communal color on the movement. As a testimonial to the noncommunal character of the movement, one can always look at the composition of the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad leadership, where a few Assamese Muslims occupy prominent positions.

In a later article, I will present some ideas on solutions to the crisis.

Pullman Students Write to Ambassador

Dear Editors,

This refers to the recent news reports about the killings in Assam. The western press presented a distorted picture of it being a communal incident, but that is not the point here. What is significant is that human lives were lost and that is our concern.

I am enclosing a letter written by some members of the India Students' Association at Washington State University to our Ambassador in Washington, D.C. We feel that the killings were a shameful incident, which deserves condemnation from every thinking mind. We urge our readers to take note of this human tragedy and to voice their concern regarding it. To you, the readers, do take some time, think about it and show that you care.

You can write directly to the Indian Ambassador (Embassy of India, 2107 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington D.C.), to the Indian Consulate (Consulate of India, 215 Market Street, San Francisco, California, 94105) or fight these tragedies at any platform you can. But, please don't be a silent spectator to

this murder of more than 3500 human beings or anything like it.

Sincerely yours,
Shahid Jameel
President, ISA
Washington State University

The Ambassador
Republic of India
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

We, the members of the India Students' Association, Washington State University, Pullman, are very concerned about the recent killings in Assam. This human tragedy has greatly aggrieved us and we feel that it is our duty to condemn all those directly or indirectly responsible for the massacre. Since it is the duty of a responsible government to protect the lives of its people, we demand that a fair enquiry be made into the matter and an assurance that no such killings will take place in the future.

Sincerely,
Members of the ISA

Assam Agitation Temporarily Suspended

Leaders Call for Rehabilitation and Integration

KISHAN BAJWA

The leaders of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) announced on March 27 a suspending their agitation. According to them, divisive forces had given a violent turn to the four-year-old movement and they urged their supporters to work for peace and to help relief and rehabilitation efforts. The leaders are determined to pursue their cause but there appears to be a feeling that something went wrong leading to many lives being lost.

The leaders of the two organizations emphasized that their relief and rehabilitation work will not be confined only to Assamese victims but covered all communities. Efforts are being made to integrate various ethnic groups. It has been decided to set up public liaison committees comprising different linguistic and religious communities.

The agitation leaders have also declared that they would continue their noncooperation with the Hiteswar Saikia government, which they consider illegal. AASU repeated its demand for a high-level judicial inquiry into all acts of violence. Its leaders said that recent incidents had made clear that the administration had totally failed to provide security to the local people and check violent activities.

Kuldip Nayar writes in India Abroad that during his week-long tour of the state, no Assamese organization was being allowed by the government to do relief and rehabilitation work. A group of doctors for instance had to go to Assam High Court to get permission. The peace committees set up by AASU, which include people from all communities are not acceptable to the government. Communities which boycotted the election are being punished in different ways.

GANDHI VISIT BOYCOTTED

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Assam to oversee relief efforts. AASU and AAGSP declared March 30 a day of mourning for those killed in violence and urged supporters to boycott Gandhi's meetings. Gauhati had a power blackout organized by AASU followers on March 31 when Gandhi visited the city. The police reportedly beat up people for not putting on lights in their houses.

In a related development, the Red Cross has accused the police of preventing its volunteers from giving medical aid to the people of Pramila village in the Nowgong district in March 31. According to Red Cross sources, a police official asked a medical officer to move the Red Cross post for security reasons because Gandhi was to visit the area.

AGITATION LEADERS FOR RESUMING TALKS WITH CENTER

Earlier AASU and AAGSP leaders had



AASU General Secretary Bhrigu Phukan (center) and President Prafulla Mahanta (right).

expressed the desire to resume negotiations with the central government as long as the new Congress(I) government is not associated with the negotiations.

During his weeklong visit, Kuldip Nayar felt that he had never seen as much support for the agitation. It is now. According to him, the movement is supported by 95% of the Assamese. He writes that he is more convinced than ever be-

fore that the tragedy inflicted on the people could have been averted if the center had not imposed the election on the Assamese people.

SPORADIC VIOLENCE CONTINUES

Sporadic violence has continued in parts of Assam killing more people due to bomb blasts and police firings. There were reports of bomb blasts during Gan-

dhi's visit to the state. According to official reports, the latest acts of violence pushed the death toll in the last 3 months of massacres, police firings and clashes to 4155.

In his address to the assembly, Governor Prakash Mehrotra announced on March 21 that the government has decided to institute a high level inquiry into the disturbances. Chief Minister Saikia claimed to have proof of RSS involvement with AASU and AAGSP.

The AASU President Prafulla Mahanta challenged Saikia's statement. He said that the political parties that hailed the election results were now organizing disturbances at a time when "the movement's supporters have engaged themselves in relief and rehabilitation work, suspending the agitation to normalize the situation."

A 60-member 3-party delegation long to Democratic Socialist Party of HN Bahuguna, Sharad Congress and the splinter Congress group in Gujarat, presented a memo to Zail Singh demanding the dissolution of the Assam assembly and the removal of the ministry and the governor.

LETTER

Dear Editors,

My apologies for being late in renewing my subscription. The editors of India Now should be commended and congratulated for their indefatigable effort in producing this monthly publication. India Now covers all issues touching Immigrants and Racism, Science and Technology, Women's issues, Government and Inequalities, Police Brutalities, Oppressed and their Struggle, Injustice, Rural, Urban and many other subjects. It has told me about Raj Chouhan and CFU, BCOFR, Arun Shourie, Justices Bhagwati and Tarkunde, Ravi Kumar and Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, Shankar Guha Niyogi and so many other people and organizations who are contributing to the struggle to achieve an egalitarian and just system. So please keep up the good work.

Sincerely
Sushil Handa, Montreal

INFORMATION REQUESTED ON INDIAN PUBLICATIONS

I am compiling a directory of newspapers, magazines, and periodicals published by Indians living in America. All the editors of such periodicals, published in English or any of the Indian languages, are requested to send a copy at the following address. Readers who know of such publications are requested to kindly inform me.

M.A.Siddiqi
4908 N. Drake
Chicago Illinois 60625
312-539-9201

Elections Commission Wrote to Govt: "Difficult to Hold Third Round of Polling"

Govt Ignored and Then Denied Letter

The Elections Commission sent an 11-page note with a covering letter to the Law Minister on February 17 making it quite clear that it was difficult to hold the third round of polling in Assam, commission sources told the Indian Express on March 17.

A copy of this detailed report was again sent to the private secretary to Home Minister P.C.Sethi and to the ministries of Home Affairs and Law by a special messenger on February 21.

This was done because the commission wanted to appraise the government of full particulars as Sethi was scheduled to make a statement on the Assam situation in Parliament on that day.

When Sethi and Law Minister Jagannath Kaushal denied the receipt of this letter in Parliament on March 14, the commission again sent a copy of the letter to the ministries on that day, saying "Apparently it was not brought to the attention of the Law Minister."

In the 11-page note, the commission stated: "During the recent past, it was made clear that the situation in the state of Assam was not ideal for holding elections. It was also known that in the com-

mission's view an ideal situation would have been when a solution to the main problem for foreign nationals would have been found or any agreement could have been reached between the concerned parties for conducting a peaceful poll with or without amendment to the Constitution and after intensive revision of electoral rolls."

The Commission informed the government that it was continuing with the process of elections only on the basis of an assurance from the Assam government that it was in a position to carry out the process.

The first round of election was held on February 14. Reports from observers sent from Delhi by the Commission were apparently not good but it was too late to halt the second round on February 17. The Commission repeatedly asked the Chief Electoral Officer whether it was still feasible to hold the third round on February 20 but received no reply.

The Commission then informed the government of its concerns. At that point, the government could have postponed the third round by imposing an Emergency in Assam. Instead, the government ignored the letter from the Commission.

CPM's Position on Assam

The statement of the CPM politburo on Assam in its paper, People's Democracy, dated January 23, noted: "The efforts made by the ruling party to amend the constitution with a view to imposing President's rule for a third successive term in Assam have been defeated." Acknowledging that the conditions in which the elections in Assam were being held were unsatisfactory, it added that it is "the only alternative to the amendment of the constitution for the prolongation of President's rule, which will surely set a precedent for the denial of democracy wherever the ruling party wants it."

The statement warned parties who called for a poll boycott that "they are really putting their full weight behind the separatist agitation in Assam." It added that CPM and its allies saw "in the anti-foreigner movement in Assam, as in similar movements in the other states and territories in India, a force of destabilization in whose creation and working

American imperialism plays an important role." And it added, "Any party that ignores this reality objectively plays into the hands of imperialist machinations against the nation, no matter what plea is put forth in support of the separatist agitations such as the present Assamese movement against the so-called 'foreigners'. It concluded its statement by demanding that the "Congress(I) government should ensure free and fair elections providing protection against the violence of the separatist agitators." It also demanded "the reversal of its policy of utilizing the state machinery for advancing selfish interests and discriminating against the left and democratic forces which have been conducting the genuine struggle for national integration."

Later EMS Namboodiripad alleged that "the divisive forces are not operating in a vacuum, but in concert with imperialist powers who are trying to balkanize India."

VIJAYAWADA RESOLUTION

The political resolution adopted by the CPM national congress in Vijayawada in 1982 notes that one of its tasks is to "fight all divisive and secessionist forces which undermine national unity." It states that the "secessionist influence in the North-Eastern region including Assam is due to the backward condition of the region and denial of rapid industrial development. The secessionists have succeeded in diverting the discontent arising from mounting economic misery into disruptive channels. They have also used the fear of foreign influx to strengthen the secessionist appeal."

The resolution goes on to allege that "adivasi areas are proving ideal ground for some foreign Christian missions to spread the message of separation from the country" and again alleges that "the imperialist propagandists are attempting to dismember the country through such

propaganda." Specifically dealing with Assam, it says the party has been "fighting the secessionist challenge and defending national unity against attacks imposed by US agencies."

This policy is in contrast to CPM's position vis-a-vis Akali Dal demands, spelled out in People's Democracy of November 28. CPM refers to its cooperation with Akali Dal in launching several mass agitations and states that Akali Dal also participated enthusiastically in the Kisan March. The statement urges the center to accept the "just religious demands of the Akalis," advocates setting up a boundary commission to look into the issue of disputed territories, and referring the Ravi-Beas water accord of 1981 to a Supreme Court judge.

(Based on Frontier)

(Editorial Comment: CPM participated in the elections in Assam and could win only 2 seats. Indira Gandhi used the same argument as Namboodiripad's when she was asked who was responsible for violence in Assam and when she put the blame on the Assam movement leaders.

Book Review

The Untouchables of India

by Dilip Hiro. Revised and Updated
by the MRG Working Group on Un-
touchables.

S. Banerjee

The London-based Minority Rights Group has released its 1982 edition of a report on the oppression of dalits. The report presents a powerful portrait of oppression. The suffering of dalits is revealed through the objective and subjective experiences of individuals and of communities of dalits, as well as through informative statistics. Overall, the report is a good introduction to the dalits' predicament for those unfamiliar with it, and a useful summary for the knowledgeable.

The report surveys the history of the caste system and of untouchability from the Aryan invasion to the present. The impact of British imperialism on dalits is portrayed as marginally progressive. Western liberal ideas are seen to have inspired reform movements among Indians to alleviate the plight of dalits, and British institutions are seen to have provided dalits with at least a taste of equality, if not with the entire feast. The question of how the exacerbation of class differences, the immiseration of the masses, or the great famines under British imperialism affected dalits is not addressed.

The reports contrasts sharply and effectively the rhetoric and legislation of the independent Indian state in favor of dalits with the bitter reality of negligence and complicity of that state in the face of the now criminal act of oppression. A Tamil Nadu police officer is quoted as saying to the journalist K. Sundar Rajan about the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1976), "If we (the police) take this law seriously, half the population of Tamil Nadu will have to be arrested. In any case, the police have better things to do than to go poking their nose into the private affairs of the people."

The victimization of dalits, through murder, assault, and discrimination is portrayed effectively. The report of the Elayaperumal Committee of the Lok Sabha, issued in 1969, cited to illustrate the discrimination faced by dalits. In various instances, dalits have been prevented from cremating their dead in village cremation grounds, from wearing shoes or sandals on caste Hindu streets, from entering a community center inaugurated by Gandhi, from sitting on seats with caste Hindu students, and even from sporting upturned moustaches.

A survey during 1978-79 by the Harijan Sevak Sangh of 1,155 villages throughout India found that dalits were denied access to public wells in 613 villages, to public temples in fully 821 villages, to the services of local washerman in 603 villages. Cities are viewed as somewhat better than villages, but nevertheless the sites of some anti-dalit violence, especially against upwardly mobile segments of the dalit community.

New Organization of Dalits and Minorities

A new organization to fight for Dalits and persecuted minorities, the Indian League for Minorities (ILM), was inaugurated at Patna on March 31, 1982. ILM expressed concern over the growing tensions, disharmony and hatred among different communities. It recommended that a permanent and autonomous authority to be established to look after the interests of the persecuted minorities and dalits to implement and work as a watch dog against the excesses or failures of the Executive and other agencies.

The ILM asked the persecuted minorities and the dalits to get rid of their fear of being less in number. The religious minorities together constitute over 40% of the total population. The percentage of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) comes to 52. All these sections of the society are suppressed by a microscopic minority. The ILM will help identify the common enemy. Then the exploited communities will come to know that they are not a minority but a majority and a great

The story of violence against dalits is told mostly in numbers but it is no less horrifying for its abstraction. In 1978, there were 15,053 atrocities against dalits reported, of which 456 were murders. Of these atrocities, 5,660 occurred in Uttar Pradesh, 3,240 in Madhya Pradesh, 1,911 in Bihar, and 1,046 in Maharashtra. The southern states had lower levels of atrocities in relation to their population than the Hindi states. Fewer than a hundred atrocities per state were reported in the northeast, the northwest (Haryana to Kashmir), and West Bengal. Of course, one must assume that many atrocities go unreported.

The report explains, "In the villages violence revolves around two inter-related issues, 'untouchability' and social status, and, even more crucially, economic status. When Untouchables refuse to countenance the old practices of subservience or demand minimum wages or the return of stolen land, this is seen by the land-owning castes as an unbearable provocation and they have retaliated with violence."

The exploitation of dalits by landlords, and their immiseration under the Green Revolution is described through some bitter statistics. In 1971, 52% of harijan workers were landless, compared to 26% of all workers, and the figure was up from 34% in 1961. The Gandhi Peace Foundation estimated that there were over 2.6 million bonded laborers in only ten states they surveyed, of whom 62% were dalits and 25% were adivasis. And between 1965 and 1975, wages for agricultural laborers rose by only 127% while the prices of what they needed rose by 157%.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the question of liberation. The report contends that there is considerable solidarity between dalits who have advanced through the meager opportunities available, and the masses of the dalit community. The Dalit Panther movement is seen as a nascent expression of the interests and aspirations of dalits and other oppressed segments of Indian society. Of the political parties, CPM is viewed as the most progressive.

The main criticism of this reviewer is that there is little effort to locate the dalits in a larger political structure, except to say that they are at the bottom. For example there is little investigation of the relationship between landless dalits and marginal peasants from backward castes. Recent Indian politics has witnessed the horror of a political backlash of backward castes in some states against dalits and against the pro-dalit rhetoric, however fraudulent, of Congress-(I). There is little sensitivity to the network of relationships between castes and classes which give rise to these differences.

force which no caste or community will be able to ignore.

The ILM also argued that the problem is not only of being economically backward but of being socially treated inferior and with contempt. The ILM shall adopt effective measures when communal tensions break out, but more than that it shall work out preventive measures in order to foster national integration and harmony.

(From Dalit Voice)

Dalit Student Union Launched

Dalit Students Federation of India (DSFI) was launched in Calicut, Kerala, on March 14. This followed a 6-day conference of the Kerala Harijan Students Federation (KHSF), the student wing of Kerala Harijan Federation led by Kallara Sukumaran. The KSHF which claims to have 200,000 out of total 600,000 Dalit students as its members was celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Farmworker Death Ruled Homicide

BC Coroner Recommends Safety Regulations

Sheilender Sharma



Farmworker's Union President Raj Chouhan with Jarnail Deol's father

(New Westminster, B.C.) March 16

The death of a Surrey farmworker who had been treated for pesticide poisoning at Surrey Memorial Hospital four times last year was a homicide, a coroner's jury ruled today.

In labeling farmworker Jarnail Deol's death a homicide, the jury said that had proper pesticide handling been practiced, this incident could have been prevented. District coroner Dianne Messiar explained, "a homicide is a death that was caused directly or indirectly by another person."

Deol, 20, had collapsed on Oct. 3, 1982, shortly after picking broccoli on Mound Farm in Surrey. He had suffered poisoning on three other occasions. He failed to regain consciousness and died from organo-phosphate insecticide poisoning 27 days later in Surrey Memorial Hospital. The poison "Monitor" was discovered in his stomach.

After deliberating for almost six hours, the five member jury made 10 recommendations based on eight days of evidence given by 22 witnesses. The jury recommended that both the B.C. and fed-

eral governments make drastic improvements in the conditions of farmworkers and in the handling of pesticides. The recommendation that farmworkers be guaranteed protection by the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) regulations represents a direct criticism of the B.C. government's decision to exempt farmers from meeting safety standards when WCB coverage becomes compulsory for farmworkers on April 4, 1983. Other recommendations made include the dissemination of safety information in various languages, emergency medical care, proper drinking and washing facilities, and certification for using pesticides.

Outside the coroner's court, Deol family lawyer Calvin Sandborn said the "indifference" of the provincial government killed the young Deol, adding "I'd say that Bob McClelland, the minister of labour, has a lot to answer for".

CFU president Raj Chouhan announced that the union will begin a major drive to pressure the government into acting on the jury's recommendations.

(abridged from E & PW)

An Indian Story Evokes Anguish and Shock in North America

Daya Varma

Tapan Bose and Suhasini Mulay's hour-long documentary "An Indian Story" has met with dismay with numerous audiences. The depiction of the suppression of human rights in India and its extreme manifestation in the blinding of undertrial prisoners has evoked sharp reaction and shock by those who thought they were familiar with the condition of the oppressed in India. Since the film was brought from India in late 1982 by the producer and director, it has been shown to large audiences in several North American cities (New York, Boston, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Albany, Syracuse, Halifax, and Stony Brook).

In most places the audience has been bigger than expected by the local organizers. In Syracuse, for example, nearly 100 people showed up for the showing. Yet,

the Indian population in this city numbers only in the hundreds. Almost 60% of the student population of RPI in Albany came to the showing of the film.

Each showing of the film has evoked long and concerned discussion. Some of the comments by Indians were "It is unbelievable", "How can such things happen 30 years after Independence?"

Perhaps the most touching experience was at the showing of the film in front of the members of the Dalit (untouchable) community in Toronto. Not merely a concern for human dignity but concern for the oppression of their own kith and kin in today's India. When called upon to talk about minority rights to a gathering organized by the Ambedkar Mission, Dr. Barbara Joshi said "I will urge you to see the documentary, An Indian Story. The film says more than I can say in words".

What has evoked this response to the film? No doubt a factor is the content for which numerous people praised the courage of these two young film makers who dared to document this series of episodes. But one cannot but reach the conclusion that there is an increasing concern among Indians living in North America about the situation of their compatriots who continue to suffer under the shackles of feudal oppression back in India.

(from Dalit Voice)

Cesar Chavez Joins CFU Protest

Cesar Chavez, president of the 100,000-member United Farmworkers of America, addressed a fundraising dinner sponsored by the Canadian Farmworkers Union in Vancouver. He spoke against the withdrawal of safety regulations by the Social Credit government. Earlier, the Workers' Compensation Board had ruled that the B.C. farmworkers would fall under its jurisdiction, and thus would be afforded their protection.

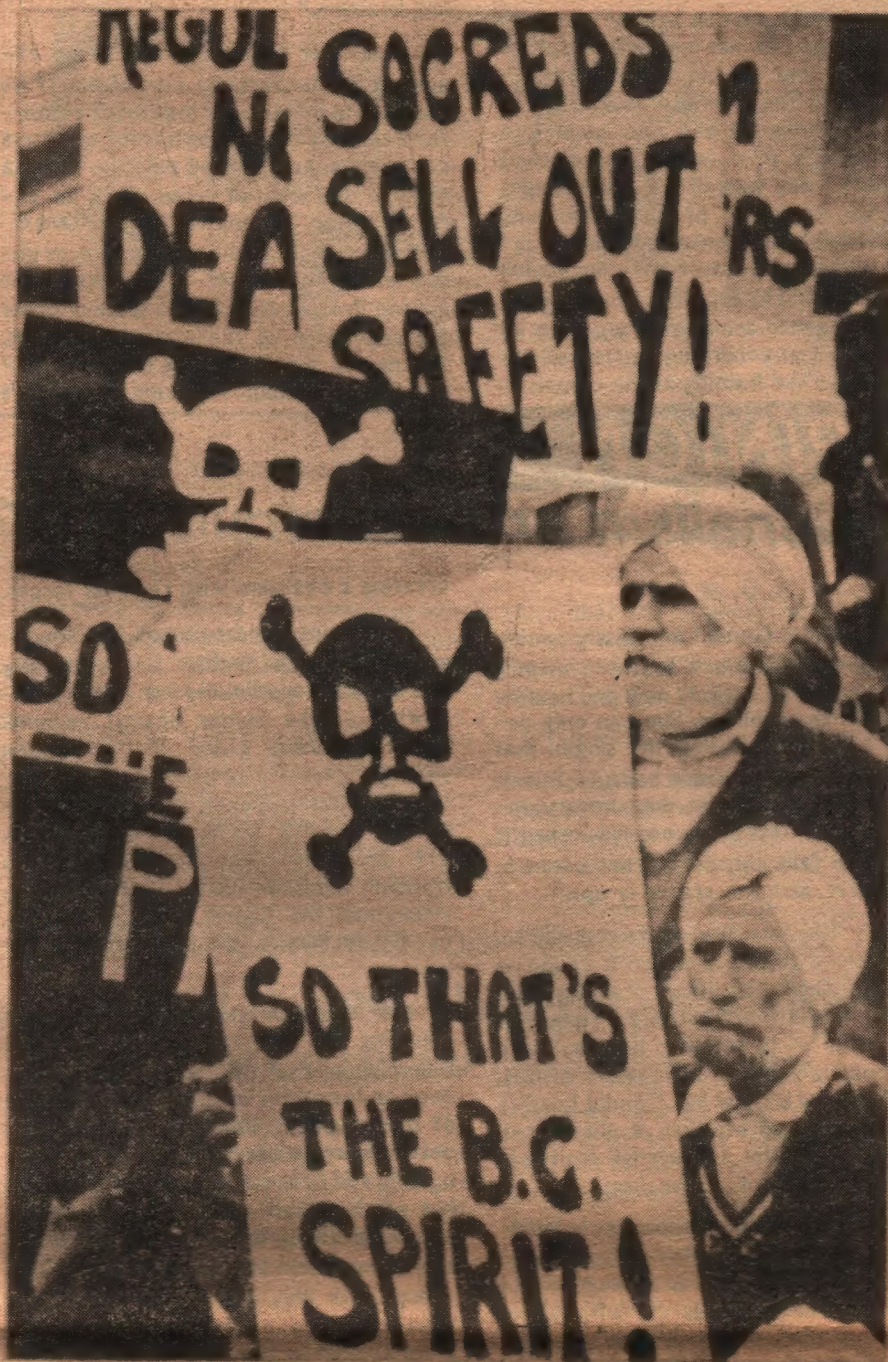
The government's dealings with farmworkers, he said, were dictated by "racial prejudice". He added that BC farmworkers were 20 to 30 years behind California in basic rights such as collective bargaining and safety regulations. He urged the 300-member crowd to use political pressure to win safety regulations in their work. "They (farmworkers) need to mobilize, they need to get every ounce of strength they can possibly get. I think they can make this a big issue for the (May 5 provincial) election."

Commenting on a WCB's decision not to provide safety regulations for farmworkers, he said: "It's a dastardly thing to do to workers; to promise them something and then to strike them off."

He said there are numerous similarities between his own struggle and the farmworkers in B.C. "First of all, it's the same industry, the same mentality by the employers. You have the feared and dreaded labor contractor systems, the workforce is non-English speaking, it's migrant, non-citizen, poor, powerless and at the mercy of exploiters. Today farmworkers in California are covered the same as any other workers, but that is the only state in the U.S. We've workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, disability insurance, good safety regulations and collective bargaining legislation, but it took a long, long time."

He pointed out that boycott tactics would be very effective in gaining political clout.

(from the Vancouver Sun)



Farmworkers Protest against the withdrawal of safety regulations.

Quesnel Organizes Against Racism

The B.C. Organization to Fight Racism (BCOFR) held a very successful meeting in Quesnel on March 26.

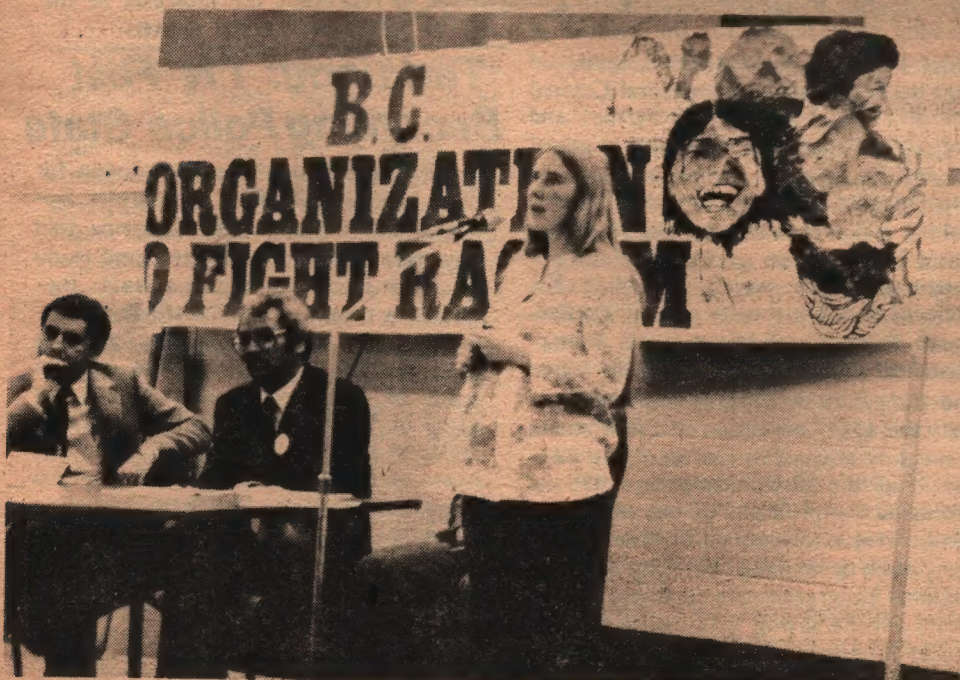
The meeting was attended by about 150 people, mostly from the East Indian community. It was chaired by Swaran Singh Jhaj, a prominent local business man and a member of BCOFR, and was addressed by Charan Gill, President of BCOFR, the mayor of the city, and a representative of the BC Teachers Federation. Paul Binning's dance group performed a bhangra dance.

It was the first public political meeting in this small community of about 18,000 in central BC. Nearly 250 East Indian families live in Quesnel.

Recently there have been several incidents of racial violence and discrimination in the area. The intervention of BCOFR in these cases has created confidence among Indians in Quesnel, some of whom invited BCOFR to hold this meeting.

Charan Gill called for unity within the Indian community and among all minority communities in the area, chief among which are the native and Chinese communities, to oppose racism. He demanded that the city council set up a Race Relations Committee with representation from minority groups. The mayor accepted this demand.

Several people became members of BCOFR following the meeting.



BCOFR meeting in Quesnel, B.C., March 26.

Ban on Turban Overruled

The House of Lords, Britain's highest court, on March 24 ruled unlawful a headmaster's refusal to admit a Sikh pupil to his school unless he removed his turban. A panel of 5 judges unanimously allowed an appeal against a court ruling last summer which declared that the headmaster was not guilty of racial discrimination and that Sikhs were not entitled to protection under the 1976 Race Relations Act. The lower court had also ruled against any appeal. The earlier ruling had enraged the minorities communities in England.

The judges from the House of Lords held that Sikhs were a racial group and entitled to protection under the 1976 Race Relations act.

IPANA Member Appointed to Vancouver Race Relations Comm.

Our Vancouver Correspondent

Vancouver's Mayor Mike Harcourt has appointed a well known member of the Indian community, Prof. Hari Sharma, to the Vancouver City Race Relations Committee.

Prof. Sharma has served as chairperson of IPANA and on the executive of BCOFR. He said, "My appointment on the committee is a recognition of both IPANA and BCOFR on the question of racism in the community."

He told India Now, "I recognize that such committees may not really solve the problem of racism, for which we have to rely on the collective strength of our people and unity with other people, but being on this and other committees serves the purpose of being watchful as to what the city does and hopefully influence its policies."

Gursharan Singh Gets Passport

Our Vancouver Correspondent

Gursharan Singh, the head of Amritsar Natak Kala Kendar, was finally given a passport by the Indian government, in early April. He had applied along with other members of his troupe some time back but his application alone had been held up without explanation.

On hearing of the delay, which would have forced a cancellation of the drama group's trip to Canada, US and Britain this summer, IPANA members and others working on the trip sent letters and telegrams to the government of India urging it to issue a passport to Gursharan Singh.

The Indian High Commissioner to Canada was met by a delegation on March 31 on this issue and also questioned by a reporter on television. He promised to look into the matter and sent a telex to Delhi. Two days later he was informed that the government had decided to issue a passport.

IPANA President Harinder Mahil told India Now that he felt that the passport had been issued because "the government had to respond to our pressure and that of others in India who had protested the delay."

Raga Strike Called Off

Javeed Mirza

The workers of the Indian restaurant Raga called off their strike after talks between their union lawyers and the restaurant management reached an accord. The agreement was reached by both parties as the National Labor Relations (NLRB) had finalized its investigation into the charges made by the workers against the management of illegally seizing tips, refusing holidays, and other harassments. The option open for both parties was to come to some agreement before the Board released its findings. Or, since the Board was expected to rule in the workers' favor, management could take back the workers, recognize the union and pay necessary monetary compensation or appeal to higher levels in NLRB. The union was not eager to wage a long and costly legal struggle.

In order to save on costly litigation, a compromise was struck which calls for the reinstatement of 13 of the 18 workers to the Raga restaurant and the rest to sister branches. Elections for union recognition were to be held among 26 official workers (13 strikers and 13 hired by the management since the strike began). 18 votes were cast against union recognition and 8 for. The workers' spokesperson, Dilip Abbi, explained this by saying that on the request of the top management (the director), and knowing that even with 13 votes they would lose (since a tie vote means no union), the workers decided to offer the management 5 votes in return for the management's oral promise to consider their demands sympathetically. He also said that even after the elections, they were legally entitled to call for a re-election (which would then be held after a year), but on the management's request that it would consider their demands more favorably without the union than with the union, the workers resigned themselves to a situation without a union.

On the positive side for the workers, the Hours and Wages Dept has determined that management had used workers' tips to pay for breakages in the kitchen and said preliminarily that the restaurant should pay back \$70,000 to the workers. The investigation is still in process. It is also investigating the complaint that the workers' tips were being siphoned off for the assistant manager and manager. Abbi told India Now that management had now stopped taking shares from their tips for the managers or for breakage. On the other hand, the management has done nothing to reduce the excessive workforce, created by the people hired during the strike, by transferring the newly hired workers to other places. Thus it is not clear how long the 13 strikers who are back at Raga will remain there.

Center - State Relations

Commission to Review Center State Relations

R. N. Raju

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi recently announced the appointment of a commission headed by retired Supreme Court Judge Sarkaria to go into center-state relations. The commission will examine the working of the present arrangements and suggest appropriate changes within the present constitutional framework.

The Prime Minister said that the terms of reference for the commission would be finalized soon in consultation with Justice Sarkaria. Also more members could be added to the commission. No time limit has been set for the submission of a report by the commission.

The formation of a commission had been demanded by the Akali movement in Punjab. The recent conference of southern chief ministers at Bangalore had called for the constitution of a fiscal commission. Non-Congress state governments such as the one at West Bengal have been calling for a review of center-state relations for a long time. It is in this context that Gandhi has announced the formation of the Sarkaria commission. Some believe that the mounting pressures on the center to review its relations with the states as well as the possibility that some of the non-Congress(I) ruled states may set up their own commissions have influenced the Gandhi decision. Under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, the center's action automatically precludes the states from setting up similar commissions for dealing with the same subject. In 1969, the DMK government in Tamil Nadu had set up the Rajamannar commission to review center-state relations.

Center-state relations had been reviewed in the sixties by the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC). The ARC disavored a structural change and considered that no constitutional amendment was necessary to ensure harmonious relations between the center and the states. The commission did suggest measures that would make the states feel their autonomy is being preserved on subjects and spheres of activity reserved for

them under the constitution. While the central government has often cited the ARC's recommendation against constitutional changes, it has not attempted to implement any of the other measures suggested by the commission. The Rajamannar Commission had also gone into many aspects of center-state relations and made many suggestions for changes within the framework of the present constitution. But the center completely ignored the report because the commission was constituted by the DMK government. The Rajamannar commission was also of the opinion that conditions had materially altered since the framing of the constitu-

tion and that the states were not prepared to be treated as "schoolboys by headmasters."

A number of issues need to be examined by the Sarkaria commission if its report is to be useful in improving center-state ties. As the southern chief ministers conference has pointed out, the criteria for the allocation of resources is an important issue. But politically important issues exist such as the circumstances under which the center is empowered to impose President's rule in a state or order the dissolution of the state legislatures, the power for the states to enact their own laws without requiring President's

assent, etc.

The formation of the Sarkaria commission has been universally welcomed by the opposition political parties. It remains to be seen what the terms of reference for the commission would be. More importantly, whether the Gandhi government has the political strength to seriously consider any improvements in the center-state ties remains questionable. This is especially significant in view of the experience of Gandhi's leadership style during the last fourteen years. In most states, the state governments have been stripped of any semblance of independence and autonomy and the various chief ministers have been forced to act as supplicants for favors from Gandhi. While this has been the scene in all Cong (I)-ruled states, the Prime Minister has never lost an opportunity to topple the non-Congress(I) governments in other states using if necessary extra-constitutional measures. Whether there can be a change in this political outlook is the question that would determine what concrete results are possible from the Sarkaria commission's work. There is very little reason to believe that Gandhi government and the ruling party are in any way prepared to permit greater autonomy to the states on any political or economical policy. Nevertheless, the constitution of the Sarkaria commission reflects the fact that the Prime Minister has been forced to respond to the successful pressures induced by recent political events. The prolonged agitation in Punjab and Assam, and the defeat of Congress(I) in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the inability to gain any strongholds in Tamil Nadu, Kashmir, West Bengal and Tripura and the relative weakness in Kerala have all contributed to the decision to at least constitute the commission on center-state relations. It is for the opposition forces to find a way to take advantage of the commission's work and try to break the concentration of power in the center. The recent southern chief ministers conference has been a positive step from this point of view, whatever its other limitations may be.

OPINION

Regionalism or Decentralization?

J. D. SETHI

Unless Mrs Gandhi needlessly panics, the proposal to form a southern council may usher in an entirely new and healthy phase in Indian politics. She can only deceive herself by raising the slogan that the center must be strong because India's unity is threatened. On the contrary, India's unity will certainly be threatened if federalism fails and the balance between the center and the states is upset.

Over the last few years regionalism has emerged as a force which is bound to challenge the arbitrariness of central authority. It is difficult to make a judgment in advance as to whether this challenge will produce positive or negative results. It will depend on how Mrs Gandhi handles the situation and whether or not she can develop capacities to harness positively the new forces of regionalism.

For Mrs Gandhi to denounce regionalism may have been a good rhetorical slogan for election purposes although it did not yield results. It was she who legitimized regionalism and used it as an instrument for the internal power struggle of the Congress party. Her very rise to power was the result of her success in

creating a coalition with regional forces.

It remains a most remarkable phenomenon of Indian politics how ruthlessly Mrs Gandhi consolidated her present authority at the center against regional leaders, thereby giving the impression that the center was being strengthened. In fact, what happened was that both the center and the states were weakened. The unconstitutional character of Mrs Gandhi's decision-making could not truly strengthen the center. Instead it succeeded in hurting the sentiments of the states.

Mrs Gandhi's statement, while announcing the formation of the Sarkaria Commission, that the center has to depend on the states for the implementation of the programs, which weak states cannot do, is welcome. But to claim that she has always believed in it is not true. She has often talked about a strong center but never about strong states. In reality she has not even been in favor of a strong center. Her idea of a strong center has always been a cumulative personalized power which in the end weakened both the center and the states.

(from the Indian Express)

Southern Chief Ministers Seek Expanded Role for States

R.N.Raju

The four non-Cong(I) chief ministers of southern states met recently at Bangalore and decided to form a Council of Chief Ministers to articulate the interests of the states to the central government. The meeting convened by Janata Chief Minister Hegde of Karnataka was attended by the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and the union territory of Pondicherry. Noticeably absent from the meeting was the Cong (I) chief minister of Kerala, Karunakaran.

The Bangalore meeting focused particularly on the fiscal aspects of the center-state relations. The proposed Council of Chief Ministers is also intended to gain a more significant role for the states in the matter of allocation of resources. The chief ministers expressed their consensus for the appointment by the center of a fiscal commission, with adequate representation for the states and statutory powers, to review the center-state fiscal relations in the light of the last 35 years of experience.

The chief ministers called for the transfer of bulk of the resources by the center to the states on a statutory basis rather than on discretionary basis. The criteria for this should be decided upon by the Council of Chief Ministers. They proposed that the existing formula for the central plan assistance be changed. While calculating the per capita income of the states for central plan assistance, a five year basis should be adopted as the basis for determining the assistance. They suggested that taxes should be levied with a view to providing substantial additional resources to the states. The Chief Ministers protested that the frequent increase in the administered prices of commodities

like steel and petroleum products had caused a transfer of resources from the states to the center. They suggested that the revision of administered prices should be in the form of increased excise duties. They called for central assistance for drought and flood relief to be outside the plan so that plan outlays were not eroded.

The chief ministers expressed the view that the total divisible pool to be shared by the center with the states had to be increased by including the surcharge on basic income tax and raising the states' share in excise duties from 40 to 60%. Corporate tax should also be included in the divisible pool with 60% of the receipts going to the states. Overall, the Chief Ministers pointed out that the total transfer to the states from the revenue receipts of the center had progressively declined and was 23.23% in 1982-83. This percentage should not be less than 40 in future.

The Bangalore meeting of the Southern chief ministers has been widely welcomed by most of the non-Cong (I) opposition parties. The Gandhi government and her party had initially taken a hostile attitude to the meeting. Kerala Chief Minister Karunakaran stayed away from the meeting on Gandhi's instructions. General Secretary Stephen of Congress(I) announced that the Bangalore meeting "is an extra-constitutional act and is highly dangerous because it panders to the rising regionalist tendencies. The meeting seems to have set the stage for a north-south fight."

The chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, has suggested the setting up of a forum of the chief ministers of the Northern states to discuss common problems especially those

related to center-state relations. Speaking at the 9th annual session of the Northern Region Association of Indian Engineering Industry on March 26, Dr. Abdullah expressed support for the move by the chief ministers of Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. "It does not matter if we belong to Congress or are pro-Congress chief ministers. The harsh fact is that the center does not appreciate or even understand the hopes and aspirations of the states."

In addition to Congress(I), Lok Dal leader Charan Singh has expressed concern at the meeting of the southern Chief Ministers. He said that it was intriguing that northern chief ministers were not invited to the Bangalore meeting. In explaining the rationale for the council of Chief Ministers, Karnataka's Hegde said that the National Developmental Council and the Zonal Council hardly met and they have become predominantly central forums where states did not get adequate opportunities to put forth their views. Taking a diametrically opposite view Kerala's Karunakaran said that it was a dangerous move which imperilled the concept of national unity and integration. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MG Ramachandran said that those who criticized the Bangalore meeting should remember that the chief ministers of these states were duly elected to represent the people. If all the 25 chief ministers met and discussed the problems of the peoples of their states in the council of Chief Ministers, such a meeting will only promote national integration. He could not understand anyone saying that such a meeting would lead to the balkanization of the country. The Chief Minister of Pondicherry, D. Ramachandran of the DMK, said that the Bangalore meeting was the first

step towards mutual cooperation between Pondicherry and the other southern states.

The meeting of the southern chief ministers already seems to have had some effects. The Gandhi government has announced the formation of a commission to review center-state relations. Following the initial hostile outbursts of Congress(I) leaders, the Prime Minister now appears to be taking a more cautious attitude towards the issue. In a recent meeting at New Delhi the southern chief ministers have spoken in a conciliatory manner and have expressed their hope that a Council of Chief Ministers belonging to various political parties could come into existence to represent the interests of the states better before the center.

Tarkunde: TN Fast Becoming Police State

The President of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and former Supreme Court Justice VM Tarkunde told reporters in New Delhi that Tamil Nadu was soon becoming a police state. Releasing a report of the fact-finding committee led by A Ramachandran, Tarkunde gave specific instances where over a score of young men were killed in the name of "liquidating Naxalites." He also added that many landless labourers had been arrested on charges of sedition. They were tortured in jails and in some cases until they died.

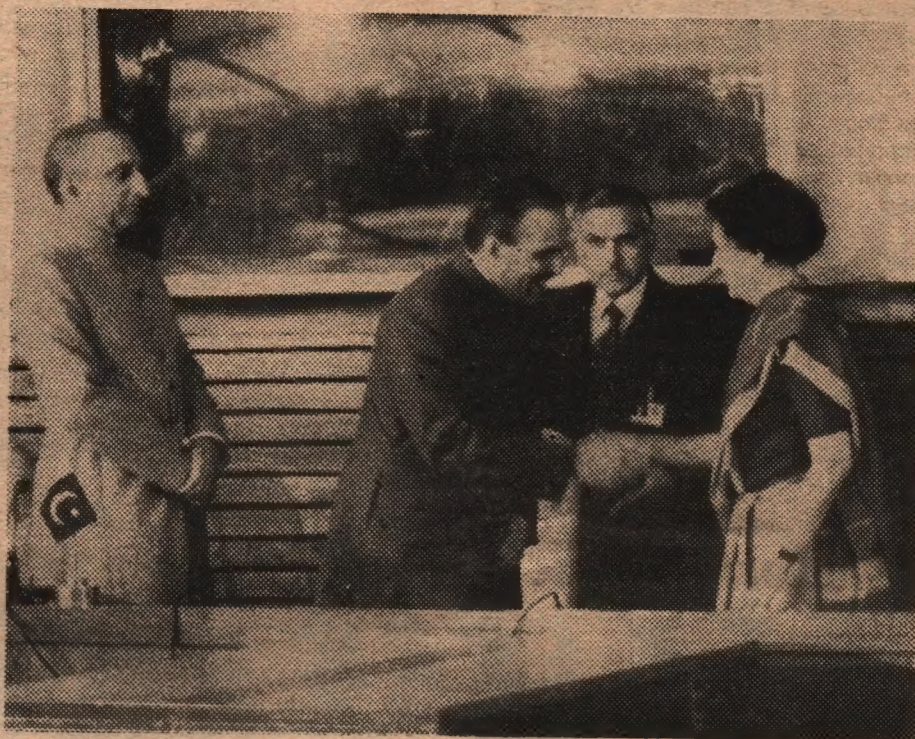
The fact-finding committee toured North Arcot and Dharmapuri districts in Tamil Nadu and felt that the police held absolute sway in these areas. At least 23 people have been killed by the police in so-called encounters in these two districts during recent years.

Indo-Pak Joint Commission Formed

Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers signed an agreement to form a joint commission aimed at improving economic, industrial and cultural relations between the two countries on March 10 in New Delhi. Pakistan's President Ziaul Huq, who was in Delhi to attend the non-aligned summit, and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi were present at the signing ceremony. At a meeting before the ceremony, Indira Gandhi said, "The doors were closed. Let them be opened one by one."

The agreement to form the commission was initiated by the foreign secretaries a few months ago in Islamabad after a communique issued following Ziaul Huq's brief stopover at New Delhi during his Southeast Asian tour to meet Indira Gandhi in November.

Indian and Pakistani leaders are still debating the differences which have emerged on the draft nonaggression pact proposed by Pakistani government and the draft friendship treaty proposed by India.



Mrs. Gandhi with President Zia-ul-Haq after the agreement in New Delhi.

Zia: Pakistan will not Allow Foreign Bases

During his visit to India to attend the nonaligned meeting, Pakistan's President Ziaul Huq said in an interview with Sunday Observer that Pakistan would never allow foreign military bases in Pakistan because Pakistan was a new entrant to the nonaligned movement. Zia added, "The nature of nonalignment is that you should not have a military pact with any third country." Referring to the Indian draft of a friendship treaty between the two countries, Zia said that he however wanted two clauses to be deleted. They are: foreign military bases and bilateral-

ism. "We want both the countries should exercise their sovereignty and remain nonaligned in the true spirit without being bound by the clauses of a treaty." Zia said that the present atmosphere was very conducive to a better understanding between India and Pakistan.

On the Kashmir issue, he agreed that that was one of the stumbling blocks but he added that "it was our effort to resolve it peacefully. What that means is a dialog and we are prepared to talk if and when India is prepared."

India Opposes Intervention in Nicaragua

Reaffirming the non-aligned appeal to the US and Honduras to take "a constructive position," India has called for a halt to armed intervention in Nicaragua.

India's acting Permanent Representative S.V. Purushottam told the Security Council that "failure to end the crisis could lead to incalculable consequences." He reiterated a call made by the non-aligned summit in New Delhi for "constructive dialog" to resolve the present conflict.

Gandhi to Speak at the UN Assembly

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would attend the next session of the United Nations General Assembly scheduled for September. Gandhi announced her decision in mid-March after the nonaligned summit; she also urged other third world leaders to attend the next General Assembly session to strengthening the UN to achieve the objectives set forth by the nonaligned summit.

South Asian Foreign Ministers to Meet

The foreign ministers of seven South Asian countries are to meet in early August at New Delhi to give a push to the concept of South Asian cooperation. The Foreign Secretaries of the seven countries met in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in early April to make preparations for the Delhi meeting. The seven countries are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.

The meeting of the regional foreign secretaries was the fourth round so far. Working groups were set up by earlier meetings to discuss regional cooperation in agriculture, rural development, telecommunications, meteorology, health and population activities, transport, postal services and science and technology.

It was felt, particularly by India, that promoting cooperation in these areas in the region would be easier than in other fields where there might be conflicts of interest. The areas of cooperation could be widened step by step over time.

New Delhi Road Named after Tito

To honor Marshal Tito, the late president of Yugoslavia and one of the founders of the nonaligned movement, it was announced on Feb 27 that the road from the Moolchand flyover in South Delhi to Panchsheel will be named after him.

Chinese Delegation Stresses Cultural Exchanges

SUDIP MAZUMDAR

The obstacles of the way to better relationship between India and China can be overcome by more friendly visits, larger trade, greater cultural and academic exchanges, says Chu Tunan, leader of the goodwill delegation now visiting India.

But what are those obstacles?

When this question is asked to the veteran Chinese leader in the middle of a

40-minute exclusive interview, he smiles and evades the question. "This is not an occasion to discuss them," he says through an interpreter.

Chu Tunan at 84 is the eldest surviving Chinese leader.

Asked what concrete steps can be taken to improve the relationship between the two countries, Chu said that there has to be more exchanges of groups of the two peoples. "Both the peoples are building their nations and we should learn

from each other," he added.

As a concrete step, he said, experts of Indian medicine can go to China and Chinese experts can come to India. There can also be "religious exchanges."

Chu Tunan and his 11-member delegation were invited by Mrs. Gandhi over tea in her South Block office to reciprocate the gesture of the Chinese Prime Minister towards the Indian delegation which went to China last August.

Some Cong(I) MPs Favor China's Entry into Non-Aligned Movement

Several members of Parliament belonging to both Houses have expressed themselves in favor of China joining the non-aligned movement.

Remarks to this effect by Congress(I) MP, B.N. Pande, were received with applause at a dinner meeting in Parliament House on March 31 in honor of the visiting delegation of Chinese parliamentarians. Present at the function were about 30 MPs, mostly Congress(I), and senior Foreign Office officials.

Organized by the India-China Society, no MP from CPI or CPM was present. Janata MP Subramaniam Swamy attended.

Paying tributes to the contribution

made by the late Prime Ministers of the two countries - Nehru and Zhou - at the Bandung Conference, Pande said that the Afro-Asian conference was the forerunner of non-alignment. "We wish China could have also been present at the recently held NAM summit," Pande said amidst applause.

Obviously referring to the border dispute, Pande said that we would not leave these "differences" to the next generation. Sitting alongside Pande, now 76, was the 84-year-old Chu Tunan, leader of the 11-member Chinese delegation.

The secretary-general of the India-China Society, S.S. Mohapatra, MP and

former general secretary of Congress(I), welcomed the team and said that in spite of occasional "irritations," the friendship between the two "giants" would strengthen. He said this was inevitable in the interests of world peace.

Justice Beg said for India there was no better friend "naturally than China." Usha Malhotra, another Cong(I) MP, called for better policy understanding on world affairs between the two countries. She wanted both to learn more and more from each other's experiences in developmental activities.

Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Shyam Lal Yadav and Lokesh Chandra also spoke.

Three Opposition Parties to Merge

The Presidents of Congress party of Sharad Pawar, Democratic Socialist Party of H.N. Bahuguna and Rashtriya Congress of Gujarat, which was recently formed by dissidents from Indira Congress, have announced plans to merge into a single party. The merger decision is to be effective only after ratification by the parties. The leaders also said that they would continue discussions with all other opposition parties and individuals to further strengthen the process of unification.

In another development, the leader of

the West Bengal unit of Sharad Congress, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, and some of his close associates have joined Indira Congress. Munshi along with former chief minister Sidhartha Shankar Ray had been indicating so for quite some time but an appropriate time was being looked for formalizing it. The forthcoming panchayat elections could be a factor for Munshi's joining Congress(I) now.

The working committee of Sharad Congress in New Delhi has disowned the local party committee of West Bengal.

Inflation on the Rise

Between March 1982 and Feb. 1983, the cost of living index for agricultural laborers increased by 9.1%; for industrial workers the increase was a little less, 8.3%. The wholesale price index went up by 6.2% while food articles which essentially determines the inflation rate in India.

Manufactured products noticed the smallest increase - 2.8%. According to the Financial Express, the price situation more cause for alarm than the annual Economic Survey presented prior to the budget.

Film on Kotnis Premiered in Beijing

"Dr. Kotnis," a film on the late Dr. Dwarkanath Kotnis, who died in China helping the Chinese during their war against Japanese occupation, was recently premiered in Beijing. The film has been produced by the Chinese government to commemorate the 40th death anniversary of Dr. Kotnis. Earlier in December, the Chinese government organized the celebrations in which Kotnis's family members including his Chinese wife and the only surviving colleague from his medical team had participated.

Dr. Kotnis's widow, Guo Qinglan, as well as Chinese and Indian officials including the Indian Ambassador AP Venkateswaran and Wang Bingnan, the president of Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, were present at the premiere. Wang Bingnan remembered Dr. Kotnis as the one "who came to the war front of our country sharing weal and woe and fighting shoulder to shoulder with our people." He went on to add, "He enthusiastically sought revolutionary truths, and taking the Chinese people's liberation cause as his own cause, his exemplary work won warm praise from all."

In the 1950s, V. Shantaram had made a Hindi film on Dr. Kotnis, "Dr. Kotnis ki Amar Kahani," based on K.A. Abbas's book with the same title.

Zail Accepts Zia's Invitation

Indian President Zail Singh has accepted the invitation of Pakistan's President Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq to visit Pakistan. The invitation was extended when Zia called on Zail Singh when he was visiting New Delhi to attend the nonaligned summit. No date has been fixed for his visit.

Letter on Gandhi Review

I read the review of Attenborough's film *GANDHI* by Daya Varma and Deepak Kapur in your newspaper of March 1983. Since the release of the movie the Indian ethnic press and the press in general have been reviewing the movie followed by many letters to the editor. I would like to make a few observations in this exchange.

The interest that the movie has generated in Mahatma Gandhi and India is immense. People in all walks of life and all over the country are going to see the movie. At a time when India had been relegated to the background in people's minds, this movie has again brought it to the forefront. From the people I meet and the reading that I have done, this publicity has been positive. Hence, if for nothing else, we should thank Attenborough for dealing with a complex and sensitive issue in a fashion that has generated positive side effects. Most children whose parents are Indian have seen the movie and had a positive reaction and actually feel proud of their parents' motherland. No amount of talking could have had the same effect.

In the press, reaction to the movie has ranged from sharp criticism (one person claimed that Attenborough has exploited the poor masses) to extravagant praise. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between. The fact that the movie can provoke such reaction is a tribute to the makers of the film, because that is the aim of making movies — to provoke emotions of various sorts (happiness, anger, fear, etc.). Some of the negative reaction has to do with the perception of individuals as to the purpose of the movie. This review seems to fall under the category of those who expected too much. This is true of a large number of people. Mahatma Gandhi was an extremely complex man who treated his own life as an experiment — no single movie is going to



The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre scene from *Gandhi*.

be able to capture this complexity. No one book, including his own autobiography, has been able to capture all the dimensions to his personality. It is too much to ask of a movie. Clearly there is room for a few more movies with Gandhi being the main focus. Some of these may be made by Indians.

In the review one of the reviewers is said to feel that "he felt at the end of the movie that he did not see an Indian movie". There is no serious claim that this is an Indian movie, if we could define

clearly what is meant by an Indian movie. It is a movie about an Indian leader whose arena of action was South Africa, India, and England — in fact the whole world.

Finally let me conclude by saying that the movie has destroyed an important myth. There has been a pervasive feeling in the world, including many Indians, that the British were benevolent colonialists. The reality of Jallianwala Bagh and its dramatic filming have destroyed that myth forever. It was an important myth

to destroy.

Sincerely yours,
Ashok Bhargava
Madison, Wisconsin

(We had the opportunity to read the above letter prior to its publication and wish to express our sincere appreciation to Ashok Bhargava for pointing to the readers of *India Now* and to us certain weaknesses in our review. — Daya Varma and Deepak Kapur)

GANDHI: A Review of Reviews

NIKHIL DESAI

Much praise and criticism has been heaped on *GANDHI* by various sources, such as film critics, Gandhi admirers in India and in the West, and in left or left-liberal circles (to name a few). It is to be noted that among the latter, judgement ranges from mild to severely harsh criticism. It is not possible to review all the comments made on the film, or even to present all the major reviews. Comments will be limited to reviews which provide critical appraisal of some of the important issues presented in the film.

INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Regardless of their political persuasions, critics of *GANDHI* have taken strong objection to the portrayal of Gandhi as the sole architect of the independence movement. True, he may have been the spiritual leader, but the complaint has been made that prominent historical figures comprising practically the entire political spectrum such as Nehru, Patel, Jayaprakash Narayan, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar were diminutively portrayed, if at all. Thus, the impression is left to the viewer that "the whole of the Indian independence struggle is subordinated to him personally and the Indian people appear in the film only as a largely unseen but vaguely threatening unruly mass. Other aspects of the struggle are ignored — the long fought battles within the Congress itself, and between Gandhi, Nehru, and other leaders." This article, published in *Lalkar*, concludes: "It is obviously impossible for a film to touch upon every aspect of Gandhi's life. However, it is what has been left out that makes this portrayal of him so misleading."

CHARACTERIZATION NOT DEEP

Gandhi's "spirit" is presented in the film as a series of various key episodes in Gandhi's life which eventually were to mold his political/philosophical beliefs. Yet one senses that this examination into his personality does not penetrate too deeply, the strange quirks and contradictions in Gandhi's personality omitted al-

together. This is unfortunate, not only because the character study is incomplete, but it would have made for a more powerfully dramatic and rewarding film. Thus, "anything which might have puzzled or offended Western audiences about this great, tough, and often ambiguous world figure had been bowdlerized. The skimpy, sanitized residue has been wrapped in a salable package of sentiment. The film reinforces the impression held abroad that the Mahatma is worshipped as a saint all over India" (*Village Voice*).

And even though the film shows him virtually always in a positive light (a "sanitization"), it does so with rather abrupt transitions in his evolution from a "loyal if dissenting British subject to a singlehanded opponent of both Britain and of Western cultural influences."

BRITISH RULE

Another aspect of the film, the portrayal of British rule in India, is highlighted in one scene which shows a military commander General Dyer ordering the massacre of several hundred Indians gathered at a peaceful rally in Amritsar. It is commendable that the ruthlessness of British colonial rule is at all portrayed, given this scene is really unnecessary within the framework of only depicting Gandhi's life. The savagery of the colonial regime is portrayed in other scenes, for example, when protesters march to the sea in defiance of the law, only to have their heads bashed in by soldiers.

Several critics, however, hold serious reservations about these scenes, arguing that the British are never seen directly brutalizing Indians, it is always Indians soldiers, sepoy, and policemen who handle other Indians.

Although there is never a doubt about complicity of the British in these scenes, the film does promote an insidious view held by many people. The film promotes the view that the British helped to curb communalism — when in fact it did quite the contrary. Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Gandhi, notes that it was disappointing that "Attenborough did not stumble upon

Oscar Sweep for Gandhi

Richard Attenborough's *GANDHI* swept through the Academy awards, which were announced on April 11. *GANDHI* won 8 awards including best movie, Richard Attenborough for direction, best actor for Ben Kingsley for his maiden major screen performance, John Briley for screenplay, Billy Williams and Ronnie Taylor for photography, John Bloom for editing, Stuart Craig, Bob Laing, and Michael Sierton for production design and Bhanu Athaiya and John Mollo for costume design. Bhanu Athaiya is the first Indian to have gotten an Oscar. Earlier, *GANDHI* got 5 awards of the British Academy for 1982, including best film, best director, best actor, and best supporting actress.

ATTENBOROUGH VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA

Recently Attenborough has sparked off a controversy after he decided to attend Gandhi's premiere for an all-white audience in South Africa. He has been publicly criticized by many anti-apartheid groups and by Gandhi's relatives in South Africa. (one editorial labeled his decision as "crass"). In her interview with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and with the ABC TV network, Ms. Naidu (daughter of Naidu who was the adopted daughter of Gandhi during his stay in

South Africa) condemned Attenborough for associating himself with the apartheid regime which is being boycotted by many cultural artists and said that she had lost whatever respect she had for Attenborough. She also said that she was trying to seek an appointment with the movie maker but his office had not called back.

Earlier Attenborough defended his stand by saying that he would attend screening not only for an all-white audience but also for colored as well as black audiences and that the movie had a message for everyone. Later Attenborough has reportedly said that he would attend the premiere only if it is multi-racial. South African distributors of the movie have been quoted as saying that they would like the premiere to be multi-racial but all the tickets have been bought by whites.

In a related development, the South African distributors of *Gandhi* refused to grant the premiere benefits to two organizations established by Mahatma Gandhi, Natal Indian Congress and the Gandhi Settlement Trust. Natal Indian Congress has recently been in government's disfavor because it rejected the formula to segregate colored from blacks and offer the colored some limited rights and representation in the all-white South African legislature.

an Indian who might have helped him to accommodate historical detail" (*Village Voice*).

OTHER RELATED ASPECTS

The selection of Ben Kingsley to portray Gandhi considerably heightens the political message *GANDHI* tries to convey. Central to whatever success *GANDHI* has had is that his performance, in addition to his character, clearly towers over that of others in the film. (Other characters are presented as either caricatures or stiff cardboard figures, lacking depth and emotion. One feels the script is better suited for the Western characters, and grossly inadequate for the Indian ones.)

While Attenborough's production effort can be seen to benefit from exten-

sive government affiliations, his direction seems to suffer from it. Given that the ever image-conscious Indian government had invested so heavily in the project, it seems likely that it would not have appreciated Gandhi and by extension India to be portrayed pejoratively. It has already tried to ensure positive advance publicity by maintaining a blacklist of Indian film critics which may not respond too favorably. Thus, "Iqbal Massud, film critic of the *Indian Express*, Khalid Mohamed, the *Times of India* critic, and other colleagues had been blacklisted from the premieres, benefits, and press shows of the film. All of them had originally protested the government participation in it or were for other reasons considered to be unfavorable to Attenborough's film." (*Village Voice*).

Indian Wins Neuroanatomy Award

Dr. Mriganka Sur, Research Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Neurobiology and Behavior at the State University of New York at Stony Brook has been awarded the Charles Judson Herrick Award of the American Association of Anatomists for 1983.

The award is given annually to an outstanding young neuroanatomist whose work has emphasized comparative neurology. Sur was presented the award along with a cheque for \$500 at the Association's annual meeting in Atlanta, April 2-6.

Mriganka Sur received his Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, in 1974 and his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from Vanderbilt University, at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1978. The award recognized his work in Nashville on the somatosensory cortex, which is the part of the cortical mantle or grey matter of the brain concerned with the sense of touch. Along with his colleagues Jon Kaas, Randell Nelson and Rosalyn Wellner, he studied how "maps" of one half of the body surface form on the opposite hemisphere of the brain. While it has been known for some time that there are representations of the different sensory surfaces (such as the retina of the eye, the cochlea of the ear, and the skin) on different areas of the cortex, the details of these maps are only now being discovered. Defining the principles of such representations is a key first step in understanding how single cells or groups of

cells encode features of objects and ultimately in understanding how the brain forms unified images of objects in the outside world. Sur and his colleagues defined maps of the skin surface in the somatosensory cortex of monkeys by recording the electrical activity of single neurons with fine microelectrodes. They discovered that there are several complete and separate maps, and that these maps have certain common topographical principles while differing in other unique ways. By studying several different species of animals, they discovered that at least two of the representations (termed the "primary" and "secondary" representations) have remained relatively unchanged during evolution while additional representations have been added in the evolution of primates.

These multiple maps imply that somatic sensation is mediated through different representations with different functions. Sur then studied the properties of cells in these various representations and discovered several differences in the way cells in different maps respond to stimuli on the skin surface.

At S.U.N.Y., Stony Brook, Dr. Sur has continued to work on the problem of sensory coding, but in the visual system of the brain. He has studied how the structure of cells in the visual pathway is related to their function, and how changes in the visual environment modifies the structure and functional properties of these cells.

Dr. Sur is a member of IPANA

Monumental Neglect

Many of our important monuments are poorly supervised and some are even allowed to crumble without the authorities seeming to care. Jaisalmer fort in Rajasthan has collapsed. In fact, Jaisalmer is a good example of a good town, with temples and sculptures several hundred years old, beginning to look quite ugly. It is undoubtedly in danger of losing some of its best monuments. Large water tanks and electricity poles and lines, erected with no sense of esthetics, disfigure the town. The vibrations from aircraft flying overhead — there is a large airbase nearby — have apparently caused cracks in several old buildings. The supply of piped water

has also had a damaging effect; the water has seeped into the foundations of the fort and other buildings, weakening them.

The story of Jaisalmer is being repeated in different forms in various parts of the country. In Delhi itself many ancient monuments, including the tomb of Razia Sultana and Emperor Bulban, have been destroyed or disfigured in the thoughtless development of the city. Part of Purana Qila in New Delhi crumbled some years ago but nothing has been done about it.

(from the Indian Express)

An Interview with Ravi Kumar

Organizer for JP Youth Movement

Javeed Mirza

I met Ravi at a friend's house. He had been sponsored by the International Service Society to come to the US and inform the people here about their movement. He seemed to be quiet and serious (though with a melancholy touch). His talk was measured. He spoke in Hindi but could understand English.

The Vahini, he said, originally started in 1974 with Jayaprakash Narayan's call for "total revolution" in Bihar. The call inspired many youths to join, but the Emergency of 1975 cut them short. All of them were thrown in jail for long periods (including Ravi who spent the whole Emergency period in jail). Coming out in 1977 they realized the necessity of the movement to develop on a national scale. In 1979, they were able to form a broader unity among likeminded youths and took up projects for work on a national level (including the famous Bodhi Gaya project).

The Vahini's ideological basis was, as he called, "grassroots democracy" consisting of non-violence, decentralization, egalitarianism, and anti-casteism. He thought that democracy as being practiced now was a fake, a system in which all the benefits have been geared towards the feudal landlords, the capitalists and

the intellectuals. He said it was these classes which dominated the political spectrum and the poor and underprivileged had never been able to get genuine representation.

The Vahini would work to see that the real representatives of the peasants, landless poor, and the tribals were sent to Parliament and the state assemblies; only then would their interests be effectively carried out. He said democracy could never be imposed from the top — the capture of political power without grassroots organization was useless. What was necessary was development of a mass movement and mass mobilization from the lowest level. Within their own organization too, everything had to be democratic. Their approach to democratic development was that no movement would be taken up until local leadership had evolved and they were willing to carry out the responsibility. The Vahinis would try to develop local leadership by organizing them into small units and providing them education and leadership talent through camps organized at the regional, state, and national levels. The camps would also train the youths in health care and agricultural development (like three-crop rotation).

Casteism, he said, was worse than class division. The organization hoped to eradicate it through educational and cultural programs (dramas with anti-caste themes). One implementation of anti-casteism was to hold mass-meals where the lower castes and the upper castes shared food.

The National Council, consisting of about 500 members, was the supreme body of the organization. The council was

Award for Swaminathan

Dr. MS Swaminathan, an agricultural specialist who is presently the director of the International Rice Institute in Manila, was awarded the Third World Prize for 1982 on April 4 for his contributions to social and economic studies. The award was presented to Dr Swaminathan in Beijing by Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang at a four-day conference on South-South strategy for development, negotiations and cooperation, jointly sponsored by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Third World Foundation based in London which established the award.

In his speech, Dr Swaminathan said that continued food imports in countries with untapped agricultural resources will be equivalent to the importation of unemployment. He also added that malnutrition problems in third world countries could be better solved by creating employment opportunities for the jobless than by stepping up the production of grains.

India Rapidly Becoming Wasteland

An article in Science magazine recently said that "India is rapidly becoming a wasteland and Indians cannot now close their eyes to their environment's degradation." Quoting a study by the Center for Science and Environment based in New Delhi, the article added that vast regions of India are being degraded by soil erosion, salinity and water-logging and desertification.

According to the study based on re-

India Launches Third Satellite

On April 17, scientists launched the third Indian satellite from Sriharikota, near Trivandrum. The 91-pound Rohini was carried by a 17-ton four-stage rocket, Space Launch Vehicle-3.

On April 18, Rohini had completed 18 orbits of the earth and it was reported to be sending clear signals to the ground. Rohini is carrying sensors capable of distinguishing water, vegetation, cloud and snow. It has a life span of 100 days.

The first Rohini was launched in July, 1980; the second went to space on May 31, 1981. With the rocket that launched the first Rohini, India had the capability to produce intermediate range ballistic missiles, but the government has been insisting that its program is for peaceful purposes only.

The Indian space program suffered a severe setback last year when its first multipurpose satellite broke down in space and had to be abandoned; it was supposed to last for 7 years.

ports by many groups in India, over half of the agricultural land is threatened by severe erosion and topsoil washing into rivers and lakes is causing widespread siltation. The report also added that area prone to floods has doubled in the past decade due to land degradation. Half of the land brought under irrigation may eventually have to be taken out of cultivation unless remedial measures are taken. Over 2.5 million acres are deforested every year.

Technology and Poverty

According to a recent article in the Population and Development Review, South and East Asia experienced a slowing or reversal of an earlier decline in mortality in the 70's. In the 50's and 60's, mortality had declined fairly rapidly in response to public health and sanitation measures. It was widely expected that the decline would continue. The leveling mortality rates has set in at higher than anticipated levels. In India, the mortality rate has stabilized at 130 deaths per 1000 infants born whereas in Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, it has stabilized at around 60 to 80; in Sri Lanka and West Malaysia, the rate around 40 to 50.

A further disconcerting feature of the slow-down in mortality decline is that disadvantaged groups benefited relatively

little even when mortality was falling fairly rapidly. Mortality differential between subgroups has increased over time. According to the authors, medical technology, which played an important role in the 50's and 60's, has finally come up against the barrier of slow growth and increased inequality. Moderate malnutrition in association with diarrheal diseases acts synergistically with respiratory and other infections causing high morbidity and mortality. According to the authors, breaking of the poverty-mortality nexus would require extensive programs of environmental sanitation and housing, preventive intervention involving education and community participation.

(Based on Eco. & Pol. Weekly)

responsible for organizational aspects (programs and strategies) and its ideological program. The council would act as a catalyst for the intended changes but would never directly participate in power. It would elect a national committee of 11 to 15 members which would run the organization. Membership in the council was strict — only full-time members could belong to it. The members were prohibited from wearing Janev (the sacred thread), they were not to accept dowry, and they were to shed their caste surname. He also said that 120 of their members had been killed in the movement until now. Only recently, 7 of their members had been arrested under NSA. Regarding their financial situation, they had 40,000 members who were doing jobs and who donated 40% of their income to the Vahini. However, 60% of their resources came from the farmers.

Ravi, who is 25, has been actively involved since he was 17. He comes from a Santhal tribal family from the Chotanagpur area of Bihar. He described the tribals' plight. The tribals eked out a living on the forest produce. The cutting down of the forests by contractors was depriving the tribals of their living resources. It also produced drought and unemployment. The Vahini was therefore opposing the forest contractors and the forestry department — the forest guard demanded a quota of 40 kg. rice, 1 hen and 1 sheep from every family for allowing them to use the forest resources for their livelihood.

Interestingly, Ravi's opinion about the working class was that workers had no concern for farmers. The workers were themselves exploiters and will never work for any change. As an example, he said, a

worker would never part with overtime work so as to help an unemployed do that job. He was only interested in paying for the water and electricity charges. He noted that India had only 15% industrial workers.

The Vahini has 40 full-time women members. The organization aimed at mobilizing women for the movement. And as the direction was of a non-violent nature, women were attracted to it. At the grass-roots level women constituted 60% of the organizational strength. Asked to suggest ways to improve women's status, he said equal portion of the property be given to women as to men. Equal wages, equal opportunities, a ban on dowries and child marriages.

Ravi said the Vahini had no links with other opposition parties. There could be some coordination with parties on common mass issues but nothing yet had been done. On asked about the possibility of having a united front with other peasant-based revolutionary organizations he was pessimistic and stressed the non-violent aspect of their beliefs.

He concluded by saying that there were continuous changes going on in society and the Vahini would always be trying to develop Bharat in new and useful ways.

It was interesting to meet Ravi. Sincerity and devotion could be discerned in him and so was youthful idealism and a lack of scientific content. But a movement which strikes against the steeped morass of feudal stranglehold, with all its backwardness, poverty, casteism is welcome. And a genuine mass movement has its own logic of shedding away its arbitrarily defined sphere and sweeping towards broader horizons.

Court Deplores Conditions in Bengal Jails

CPM Tries to Suppress Publication of Photos

S. B.

Our Calcutta Correspondent

It all started with the death of one Santosh Bah, a convict prisoner confined in the 'non-criminal lunatic' (NCL) ward of Dum Dum central jail on January 8, 1983. On the next day, some 100 inmates of that jail, including a dozen 'Naxalite' prisoners went on a hunger strike alleging that Santosh Bah had simply fallen prey to sheer indifference and maltreatment by the jail authorities.

Consequently, Justice P.C. Barooah's bench of the Calcutta High Court started a case of violation of human rights and appointed Mr. Tarun Ganguly and Mr. Sujoy Sengupta, respectively the chief reporters of two Calcutta English dailies, the Telegraph and the Statesman, as special officers of the court to investigate into the conditions in the Dum Dum central jail. They submitted their daily reports to Mr. Barooah on January 25.

On January 31, despite the State counsel's repeated prayers to the contrary, Mr. Barooah allowed those reports to be published in the respective dailies. Nevertheless, permission to publish some photographs and three paragraphs of Ganguly's report was withheld.

But, surprisingly and strikingly enough, the Feb. 13 issue of Sunday, an English weekly, and later the Feb. 17 issue of the Telegraph brought some of those controversial but revealing and vivid photographs to light. The Feb. 17 issue of the Telegraph gave the matter center-spread treatment and along with those photographs carried one signed article titled "If the price to be paid for publishing these pictures is a trip to jail, so be it" and an open letter to Jyoti Basu by M.J. Akbar, the editor of the Telegraph and Sunday.

In his open letter titled "If you have tears, Mr. Basu, shed them for those inmates of Dum Dum central jail ...," Mr. Akbar contended, "(The government lawyers) tried their best to see that the reports of the jail conditions were not published; they failed. They are aware that these pictures are a million times more damaging ... There is no argument against these pictures ... But your lawyers are torturing their minds and spending their time to see that the truth remains buried ..." "See these pictures again, Mr. Basu, and then ask your lawyers if they are hurting or harming the government with the ridiculous arguments they are placing ... Would Karl Marx have stood in court and defended the jail authorities for such callousness against the most wretched of our earth? Tell me, Mr. Basu, what should I say if tomorrow my friends accuse me of having defended a government which is no better than Jagannath Mishra's?" Mr. Akbar asked.

This was perhaps too much. Consequently, at the plea of the Dum Dum central jail authorities, the court served Mr. Akbar and Mr. Bappaditya Roy, respectively the editor and publisher of Sunday and the Telegraph, with show cause notices as to why proceedings for contempt of court should not be started against them? This was on February 22.

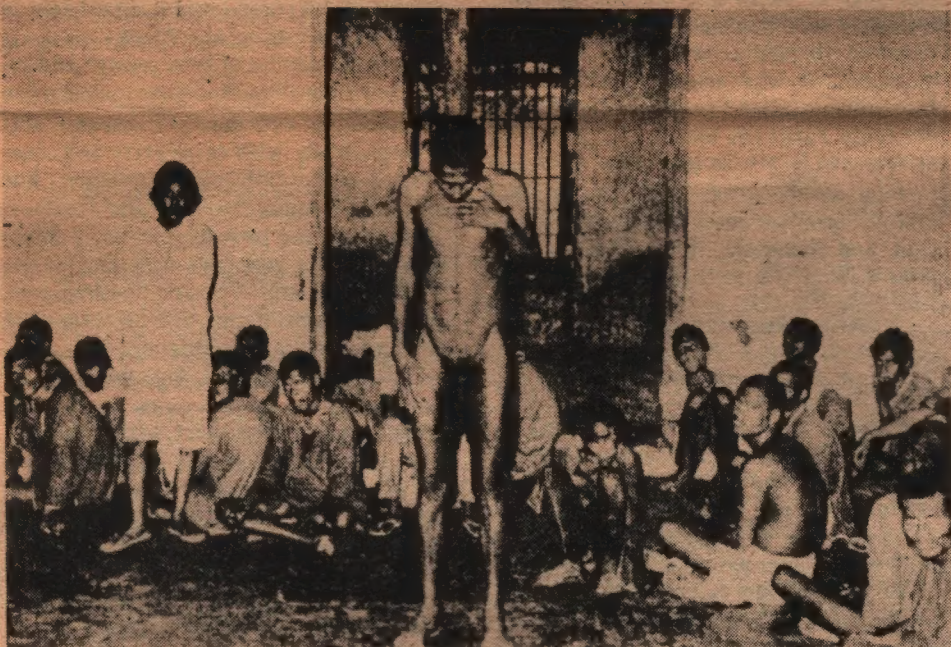
Amidst mounting popular interest, on Feb. 24, Mr. Barooah came out with his judgement in the Dum Dum Central jail case. While observing the conditions in the Dum Dum jail to be "horrible, particularly in the non-criminal lunatics' ward", Barooah recommended a series of corrective measures including the introduction of a permanent system of regular visits to the jails by non-government officials.



An inmate of the lunatics block sits beside a wall covered by blood stains from bugs killed by the inmates. - The Telegraph.

And then, to wind up, Barooah delivered his judgement in the case on March 1. Barooah dismissed the contempt plea. He accepted that his order had of course been violated, but given the extraordinary circumstances, he chose to reprimand Mr. Akbar and not issue any rule of contempt of court. At the same time, he lauded Mr. Akbar's journalistic zeal to safeguard the public interest.

So far, so good. But is it a pitiful fact the efforts undertaken by the Left government throughout this episode proved only to be self-defeating. It not only allegedly suspended two warders of the jail for co-operating with the pressmen but also, finding it no more possible to hide the truth, contrived to rush some amenities to the prisoners, had them photographed and then produced those photographs in the court. Still, in consonance with Barooah's observation, one can only hope that such improvements would become a permanent feature.



Inmates of the lunatic block. - Sunday.

Police Fire on Calcutta Demonstrators, Killing One

One person was killed and several injured when police fired to disperse a rally organized by the Socialist Unity Center to protest against the revision of bus and tram fares in Calcutta on March 30. Over 200 protesters reportedly put up a road blockade. The police asked them to end the blockade, but after getting no response, lathi-charged. The demonstrators reportedly turned violent and threw stones and bombs at the police in which 19 policemen were injured.

In the state assembly next day, Left Front Chief Minister Jyoti Basu of CPM described the person killed, Dulal Chandra Das, as an anti-social element and defended police firing. Congress(I) leader Subrata Mukherjee called Das as a supporter of Congress(I) youth wing.

Meanwhile Saroj Mukherjee, chairman of the left front committee and the secretary of the West Bengal state committee of CPI(M), criticized the police firing. He added that the left front supported democratic and peaceful movements even when they were organized by the opposition parties.

A letter from the students unions at Jadavpur University in Frontier reported attacks from police, CPM and Student Federation of India (SFI) cadres on students who have been protesting against increased bus and tram fares. According to the letter, on February 28, 60 outsiders belonging to SFI went on the rampage inside the University campus armed with revolvers, daggers and iron-rods and in-

50 Dead, 1500 Injured in Cyclone

A cyclone hit 20 thickly populated villages in 24 Parganas, a coastal district in West Bengal on April 12. At least 50 people were killed and over 1,500 injured. Many have been made homeless. Several thousand huts have been destroyed.

The village of Thakurnagar was the worst hit where thousands of people had gathered for a festival.

Bad weather was reported in large parts of North India, which would cause considerable damage like last year to the wheat crop.

Supreme Court Rules: No Mandatory Death Sentence for Murder

The Supreme Court on April 7 narrowed the scope of death sentence when it struck down Section 303 of the Indian Penal Code under which hanging was compulsory in certain cases.

"There shall be no mandatory sentence of death for the offense of murder," the court said. The provision, passed in 1860, said that a life convict who commits murder will be hanged. The Constitution bench, consisting of Chief Justice Y.V.Chandrachud and Justices Mur-taza Fazal Ali, V.D.Tulzapurkar, A.Varadarajan and O.Chinnappa Reddy, in a unanimous judgment called the provision a relic of the British era and arbitrary.

Writing for the court, the Chief Justice said that life imprisonment was the punishment for offenses listed in 51 sections in the penal code. To make capital sentence compulsory for those who have committed a murder during the life term for any of these crimes would be arbitrary and unconstitutional.

"A standardized mandatory sentence, and that too in the form of a sentence of death, fails to take into account the facts and circumstances of each particular case," the judgment explained.

The judgment pointed out several instances in which mandatory hanging would be extremely unjust. A life convict may be driven to retaliate against a warder who habitually tortures, starves and humiliates him. Another convict may be provoked by an insinuation against his wife's chastity. It would be unfair if these life convicts were sentenced to death without giving an opportunity to be heard by a court.

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